

VARIOUS

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL
OF POPULAR
LITERATURE, SCIENCE,
AND ART, NO. 694

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*Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art, No. 694 / April
14, 1877.:*

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THE COMING OBELISK

For more than fifty years we have heard of projects for bringing to England the prostrate obelisk lying on the sandy shore of Egypt at Alexandria, and popularly known as Cleopatra's Needle. Every successive scheme of this kind has come to nothing. When the French army quitted Egypt in 1801, the British officers, wishing to have some memorial of the victories of Sir Ralph Abercrombie, claimed the prostrate obelisk as a spoil of war, and formed a plan for bringing it to England. A ship was obtained, a mode of stowage planned, and a jetty built between the obelisk and the beach. The Earl of Cavan, in command of the troops, headed the scheme; Major Bryce, of the Royal Engineers, worked out on paper the details of the operation; while officers and men alike subscribed a certain

number of days' pay to meet the expenses. The obelisk was to be introduced into the ship through the stern port, and placed on blocks of timber lying over the keel. But difficulties of various kinds arose and the scheme was abandoned.

Eighteen years afterwards the Pacha of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, presented the prostrate obelisk to the Prince Regent; the British government accepted the gift, but took no steps towards utilising it, being deterred by an estimate of ten thousand pounds as the probable cost of bringing the monolith to England. Thirty-three more years passed; the Crystal Palace Company was organising its plan for the costly structure and grounds at Sydenham; and a question was started whether Cleopatra's Needle would form an attraction to the place. Men rubbed up their reading to ascertain how the ancients managed to remove such ponderous masses as this. It is certain that the stone must have been quarried in Upper Egypt, and conveyed somehow down to Thebes, Alexandria, and other places in that classic land. Pliny describes a prostrate obelisk which was moved to a distance by digging a canal under it, placing two heavily laden barges on the canal, and unloading them until they were light enough to rise and lift the obelisk off the ground; it was then floated down the Nile on the barges, and landed and set up by the aid of a vast number of men with capstans and other apparatus. A plan was suggested to the Crystal Palace Company for bringing Cleopatra's Needle to England on a raft; but the idea was relinquished. Subsequently there were several projects for importing the obelisk; but they also fell

through, after not a little eager expectation and talk. Thus, from one cause or other, the famed obelisk was left undisturbed, and what may be deemed British property still lies in a kind of buried state among the sands on the coast of Egypt. Luckily, it has not suffered injury by delay in removal. The stone is of a hard texture, and its entombment has been rather an advantage than otherwise. Although first and last there has been much said about Cleopatra's Needle, we shall attempt to give some account of it and of a freshly conceived plan for bringing it to England.

The ancient Egyptians excelled in the art of erecting magnificent temples, pyramids, obelisks, and other works in stone, all of which, or the ruins of them, fell into the hands of successive conquerors – Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and finally the Turks. Among the long roll of monarchs of the ancient Egyptians, one stands out conspicuously for grandeur of character and the splendour of his reign. That was Thothmes III., who flourished fourteen hundred and forty-four years before the commencement of our era, that is to say, three thousand three hundred and twenty years ago. He ordered to be executed two obelisks of gigantic dimensions for the City of On, or City of the Sun, the name of which was changed by the Greeks to Heliopolis, a word signifying the same thing. During the lifetime of Thothmes, the obelisks were cut out of the quarries of Elephantiné, which consist of the rose-coloured granite of Syene, or Es-souan. These obelisks were to be set up in front of the Temple of the Sun, and in however mistaken a way, must be

viewed as a pious tribute to the Almighty, personified in the Sun as the author of Light and Heat, the fructifier and sustainer of animal and vegetable existence.

The preparation of the two obelisks was the work of years. Before their completion, Thothmes III. had passed away; and the honour of setting them up in their appointed place belonged to one of his successors, Rameses II., familiarly known to us as Sesostris. We can fancy the imposing ceremonies which took place in erecting the obelisks in front of the Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis. Both obelisks were inscribed with hieroglyphics, signifying that they were erected to the god Ra, or the Rising Sun, and to Tum, or the Setting Sun, which identify them with the most ancient and perhaps most poetical superstition in the world. To these hieroglyphics were added others by Rameses II., commemorative of certain military conquests.

And where is now Heliopolis, the City of the Sun, at which these grand obelisks were set up and venerated by the ancient rulers of the country? It is extinct. As in many other old Egyptian cities, its dwellings, built of unburnt bricks, have long since crumbled into heaps of dust. Its splendid monuments are destroyed or dispersed. When the Romans took possession of the country, the two obelisks that had been erected by Rameses II. in honour of the Sun were removed by the celebrated Cleopatra to grace the Cæsarium at Alexandria about the year 40. There, near the shore, they were set up. One of them remains where it was placed, and is a well-known landmark. The other fell, from

what cause is unknown, and there it has lain till our times.

Such in brief is the history of Cleopatra's Needle. It is upwards of three thousand three hundred years old; and whether standing or lying, it has been at Alexandria for at least eighteen hundred and thirty years. How along with its fellow it was transported from Heliopolis to Alexandria, can no more be known than how the Pyramids were built. Doubtless, there would be an enormous expenditure of human toil; but at the time that was not regarded. Unfortunate beings captured in battle were condemned to slavery, and if they perished in dragging huge stones, no one cared. If Cleopatra's Needle could speak, it would tell of cruelties of which we can form no adequate conception.

The two obelisks were nearly of the same dimensions; and standing in their original position in front of the Temple of the Sun, they must have had a most imposing appearance. The prostrate obelisk, square in form, measures sixty-eight and a half feet long, six feet eleven inches wide on each side at the base, tapering to four feet nine inches near the summit, whence it narrows to a pyramidal point called the pyramidion.

We may have a pretty good idea of its appearance from that of the Luxor obelisk, set up on a pedestal in the Place de la Concorde at Paris, which is the same shape, and measures seventy-two feet three inches in height, exclusive of the pedestal of fifteen feet, and weighs five hundred thousand pounds. The cost of removing this obelisk from Luxor, near Thebes, to Paris, was about two millions of francs, or eighty thousand pounds. It

is a handsome monolith, of reddish Syenite, but unfortunately it is damaged near the top, and suffers from the bad taste exhibited in the pedestal on which it was erected in 1836. In Rome there are a number of obelisks of different sizes that had been brought from Egypt by the Romans. Europe may be said to have come in for a fair share of these ancient monuments. There is room, however, for one more – Cleopatra's Needle, which, had matters been managed rightly, should long since have been brought to England and set up in the metropolis.

This brings us to the project now set on foot by Mr Erasmus Wilson, an eminent surgeon in London, and who has munificently undertaken to be at the entire cost of bringing the obelisk from Alexandria. The idea of doing so arose, as Mr Wilson explains in a letter to a friend, in having had a communication from General Sir James Alexander, C.B. 'He, Sir James, recounted that he had paid a visit to the prostrate obelisk at Alexandria in the spring of 1875, with the view of ascertaining its state of preservation and the possibility of bringing it to London; that he stripped it of its covering of sand, and found the column uninjured, and that he felt assured that its transit might be safely accomplished; that all that was needed were the means of defraying the cost, and the determination to bring the undertaking to a successful issue; that he contemplated for this object to obtain the interest of the city of London and the government; but that, although he had secured the co-operation of the Metropolitan Board of Works for a site on the Thames

Embankment, he had made no substantial progress.' Mr Wilson goes on to explain what he did in the circumstances. 'On the 7th of December, I had a conversation with Sir James Alexander. He was very anxious to succeed in his object, and he mentioned a plan proposed by Mr John Dixon, C.E., whom I promised to see. At my interview with him, I listened to his plan. He explained the position of the monolith, within a few yards of the sea, and the ease with which it could be inclosed in a cylinder, rolled into the water, towed to the harbour for the purpose of putting on to it a keel, a rudder, and a deck, and then ballasting it to a proper depth of flotation. The process required care, nicety, and judgment, but was evidently sound and practicable.' The professional advice Mr Wilson received helped to confirm this opinion, and he finally resolved to enter into a contract for the safe transport of the monolith. Mr Dixon was willing to limit the cost to eight thousand pounds; but to leave no room for failure, it was agreed he should receive ten thousand pounds on the safe erection of the obelisk on the Thames Embankment within a specified period. A contract was entered into on this basis; Mr Dixon undertaking all risks.

We gather from Mr Wilson's letter that he had serious misgivings as to the success of a public subscription, and that after all it was a shabby kind of proceeding, unworthy of so great an object. In short, feeling he could afford the outlay, he took the matter in hand personally, and the element of expense was therefore at an end. Any other difficulty was removed by Mr

Dixon receiving the concurrence of the government and of the Khedive of Egypt. 'I have,' says Mr Wilson, 'the assurance from Mr Dixon that the cylinder ship with its precious freight may be expected to float into the Thames in July next.'

So far as we can understand the proposed plan, Cleopatra's Needle is to be fixed by cross divisions or diaphragms of wood in a cylindrical vessel of malleable iron plates. There will be seven diaphragms, and consequently nine water-tight compartments. For safety, the obelisk will be inclosed in wood, and well packed, a little below the central level of the vessel, which will be closed at both ends. When completed with the obelisk inside, the vessel will be about ninety-five feet in length and fifteen feet across. After being rolled into the sea, and towed to the harbour, it will be ballasted, and be provided with a keel, deck, sail, and rudder. For these operations, manholes will have been left in the cylinder. These holes will be opened, so that access may be obtained to all the compartments. There will be no part into which a man may not enter if necessary, until the cylinder is finally sealed up for floating.

When made thoroughly ship-shape and sea-worthy, then the vessel with its precious freight will set off on its voyage, under the charge of two or three skilled mariners, for whom a small cabin on deck will be provided. It will be towed the whole way by a steam-tug; the sail being simply for steadying the cylinder. The steam-tug, or with whatever other assistance that may be necessary, will tow the vessel up the Thames, and lay

it alongside a convenient part of the Embankment. Where its precise site is to be has not, we believe, been determined. By the agency of hydraulic power, there will be no serious difficulty in raising it to an erect position on its assigned pedestal. There will, we think, be a concurrence of opinion, that no site would be so universally acceptable as on some conspicuous point of the Thames Embankment, where the effect towards the river would be particularly striking. What more fitting place of permanent repose than the banks of the 'Silent Highway' for the ancient symbol of contemplative veneration, the Divine Architect of the Universe, Ra and Tum?

A great day for the metropolis will be that on which this vastly interesting monolith is stuck upright in English ground! We can shew some minor works of art of perhaps as great antiquity, such as the stone axes of the pre-historic period, but nothing to compare with the product of Egyptian civilisation something like four thousand years ago. Trusting that no untoward accident may occur to derange the plans for the maritime transport of this interesting object, there cannot but be a universal feeling of satisfaction at the gracious manner in which Mr Wilson has organised a scheme for effecting what has baffled everybody since the beginning of the present century. When there is so much begging of money for all sorts of objects, the heartiness of his spontaneous generosity will be frankly acknowledged.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER XVIII. – MARIAN'S GENEROSITY

Marian was, I believe, genuinely disappointed at Lilian's decision to leave Fairview and retire with her aunt to some cottage home.

'It will look so!' she ejaculated again and again; which words perhaps best expressed her sentiments upon the point. 'People might think I had not been inclined to behave handsomely towards you, you know; but I'm sure no one could offer more fairly than I do. There's the run of the place, and a carriage to ride out in, and your keep, and all that; besides two hundred a year to spend as you please. *I* had only two hundred a year to do everything with, you know, before Pa died. And if that isn't enough – well, I shouldn't perhaps mind saying' —

'It would be a great deal more than enough,' murmured poor Lilian. 'Only I must be with my dear aunt wherever she is, and she prefers having a home of her own, however humble. – Do you not, auntie?'

Mrs Tipper was very decided upon that point; and Marian did not object. 'Auntie' was quite welcome to consult her own taste in the matter. Indeed Marian was more ready to fall in

with the little lady's desire to leave Fairview than it was under the circumstances quite polite to do. 'But for you, dear, it is altogether different,' she went on to urge. 'You are young, and have been brought up like a lady; and it really seems quite cruel for you to be going to live at a cottage, when there's such a home as this offered you.'

'I should prefer being with my aunt,' repeated Lilian, with flushed cheeks, turning her eyes, full of tears, lovingly towards the little lady, who nodded and smiled as though to say: 'Do not fear my being wounded by anything that is said, my dear. I shall only be troubled when you are.'

'You haven't tried it yet, dear,' sagely returned Marian; 'and you don't know what it is to live like poor people. Think better of it; and I will have a *distang-gay* lady to go about with us; and we will fill the place with company, and have lots of gaieties. Do, pray, think what you will be giving up, before you make up your mind.'

But she found that Lilian was not to be tempted; and Marian was at length brought to see that her arguments were of no avail. So I think she satisfied herself with the reflection that she had done all that could be expected of her, only stipulating that Lilian should acknowledge her generosity to 'people,' as she indefinitely termed the Fairview world.

'It is only fair that it should be made known that I was ready to act generously, you know.' Lilian promised that it should be made known. Moreover, when at length matters were finally settled,

Marian begged Lilian to take anything which she had a fancy for with her.

'I mean, of course, the things that have been given to you, you know,' she said a little hurriedly, as though afraid that her generosity might be interpreted too literally; adding, with a little laugh: 'If you took *everything* you fancied, there would be nothing left at Fairview, I expect! But there; just say what is yours, and I will take your word for it!' she ejaculated, in another outburst of good-nature.

If it had been left to Lilian, very little would have been taken from Fairview. But it was not left to her; and Mrs Tipper and I were more business-like, and did not hesitate to secure for Lilian not a few valuables. That little lady recollected a great many things which had been named by Mr Farrar as gifts to his child. Fortunately for her, he had been in the habit of talking about any new purchases which he made to add to the glories of Fairview, as presents to Lilian. In fact, had we kept strictly to the letter of Marian's offer, and taken whatever had been given to Lilian, we might have carried away nearly everything the house contained. As it was, we did not scruple to claim a great deal. Her mother's jewellery; a nice little collection of pictures; the grand piano, which had been a birthday present; and an endless assortment of valuables, even to a new silver dinner-service. For the last, we were indebted to Saunders, who reminded Mrs Tipper and Lilian that Mr Farrar had mentioned at the dinner-table having ordered the new pattern expressly for his daughter, by-and-by,

naming the cost. Poor Mr Farrar! it is pitiful to reflect how glad we were to avail ourselves of his little ostentatious speeches, for the benefit of his child.

But in spite of herself, Marian began to look very grave and anxious as one thing after another was eagerly named by the servants as 'Miss Lilian's.' They had got scent of what was going on, and were eager to give evidence of this or that having been given to her. She had made up her mind to be generous, and strove hard with herself. But when it came to be a question of a set of diamonds, she could control herself no longer, nervously questioning as to the evidence of its having been a gift to Lilian's mother. Was the inscription inside the case – 'To my dear Wife, on our wedding-day' – sufficient to make the diamonds Lilian's; and would Lilian mind repeating his exact words when her father put them into her hands on her last birthday.

'Of course I only want what is right; but she wasn't his wife, you know; so it couldn't be their wedding-day,' anxiously ejaculated Marian, her eyes dwelling fondly upon the jewels in their open cases.

Fortunately for us, Lilian fled at the first words, and we had Robert Wentworth to help us, so we battled courageously for the diamonds, and at length gained the day. Marian was obliged to yield, though she did so with a sigh over 'Pa's extravagance.' 'He never gave diamonds to Ma! Why, Lilian will have quite a large fortune to take away, with one thing and another!' Then, in reply to some allusion from Mr Wentworth about

the fortune Lilian was *leaving*, he was sharply reminded that it was not hers to leave. 'People seem to forget that it's only my rights, and if it were not for my generosity things would be very different for Lilian.' For she was, I think, beginning to feel that her generosity was not sufficiently recognised, and it required some little encouragement in the way of being appreciated to keep it alive. Meanwhile, Mrs Tipper and I were quietly at work in search of a cottage. We succeeded beyond our expectations; being fortunate enough to secure a pretty little place on the outskirts of a neighbouring village, at a very moderate rent, Robert Wentworth giving us material assistance in the negotiations. Having overcome the dear little woman's scruples about accepting half of my fifty pounds as my share towards the first three months' housekeeping, we gave ourselves up to the business of furnishing; and in this also Robert Wentworth was of much assistance to us, though I do not think that any one besides myself attributed it to anything warmer than friendship. Becky and I and a couple of work-people were busily engaged from morning till night in arranging and making ready, in order that no time might be lost in getting away from Fairview before Marian's good-nature altogether collapsed. Lilian was becoming very anxious to take her departure; and it was evident that to Mrs Tipper herself the change would be a very welcome one.

'To tell the truth, my dear, it will be a real blessing to me to live in a small house and be able to go into my own kitchen again,'

she confided to me. 'You and the dear child will be the company in the parlour; and I shall make the puddings and pies, and know what's in them!' she ejaculated, enjoying her little jest.

Of course I did not mean to be idle, though I agreed that the dear little lady should reign supreme in the kitchen. Becky was to be our factotum; and very proud she was of the position, making it very evident that Fairview had altogether lost its attractions for her now. We began to plume ourselves upon having quite a little model home, where nothing but love and peace would be admitted. Ah me! it was as well we should think so!

It was a very pretty, if somewhat fantastically built cottage, which had been erected for an ornamental lodge at the entrance of a fine estate, the property of an old but impoverished family, which had been brought to the hammer, and sold in separate portions. The house itself – a fine old place, built in one of the Tudor reigns – stood on an eminence some two miles distant, and had been taken on lease by some benevolent lady, for the purpose of making a Home for girls who had suffered imprisonment, with a view to prevent their further degradation.

Our cottage was situated just out of the village, which lay in the hollow at the foot of the hill, on the side of which stood the house which I have mentioned as being visible from one part of the Fairview grounds, and which I so coveted for my married life with Philip. A little to the left, at the back of our cottage, still stood a portion of the fine old woods as they had been for many a generation of the A – family. The land on the other side of

what had once been the avenue, had been turned into hop-fields and so forth. In front of the cottage, the space had been so much encroached upon that what had once been a fine private road was now but a narrow lane. Branching from that lane, on the right was the village, and on the left another lane leading to a field, through which there was a right of way to the railway station; and from the stile of that field ran two paths, the lane I have mentioned passing the cottage and on to the village; and another lane at right angles with it, leading through the woods. There was some little talk of *my* house soon being in the market, said the work-people, to whom I was curious enough to put a few questions about it. The lease was expiring, it seemed, and the present residents did not intend to renew it. This was news indeed. If, by good fortune, Philip arrived in time to secure it, how delightful it would be; the two others I most cared for in the world living so near us! How delightful to be able to shew my appreciation of the kindness I had received in some better way than by words! Then I pleased myself with another pretty picture of the future, in which Lilian and Robert Wentworth were the principal figures.

That Lilian would very long remain as depressed as she now was, I did not believe; her mind was a too healthy one for that. Indeed the reaction had already set in. After the first shock was got over, she was, I think, not a little astonished at the comparatively small amount of regret she suffered on account of the loss of her lover. It might be that she was beginning to realise the fact that her love for him had never really been what she had

imagined it. In one point she was mistaken. She believed that he also had deceived himself, and was firmly persuaded that he did not love her and never had.

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