JAMES BAIKIE

PEEPS AT MANY LANDS: ANCIENT EGYPT

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Содержание

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PLATE 1. AN EGYPTIAN GALLEY.


THE GREAT SEA
(MEDITERRANEAN SEA)
Alexandria
Damietta
Port Said
CANAAN
Tanis
TANIS
(Zoan)
ZARU
Wilderness
of
Shur
Bitter
Lakes
HELIOPOLIS (On)
Cairo
Suez
Gizeh
PYRAMIDS
MEMPHIS
(ancient Capital)
Wilderness
of
Paran
Birket el-Karun
Akaba
Medina
Beni Suef
SERABIT
EL KHADEM
Gulf of Suez
Abu Girgeh
SINAI
Minia
Derut
BENI-HASAN
(Rock Tombs)
TELL-EL-AMARNA
(the heretic Capital)
Ras
Mohammed
SIUT
RED
SEA
Girgeh
Keneh
Nile
Wadi Hamadi
KOSSEIR
ABYDOS
(Tombs of Earliest
Kings)
THEBES
(Capital of the
Empire)
(Luxor)
Khargeh
Esna
Oasis
of
Khargeh
EDFU
(Great Temple)
EGYPT
ARABIAN DESERT

SKETCH-MAP OF ANCIENT EGYPT.

CHAPTER I
"A LAND OF OLD RENOWN"

If we were asked to name the most interesting country in the world, I suppose that most people would say Palestine—not because there is anything so very wonderful in the land itself, but because of all the great things that have happened there, and above all because of its having been the home of our Lord. But after Palestine, I think that Egypt would come next. For one thing, it is linked very closely to Palestine by all those beautiful stories of the Old Testament, which tell us of Joseph, the slave-boy who became Viceroy of Egypt; of Moses, the Hebrew child who became a Prince of Pharaoh's household; and of the wonderful exodus of the Children of Israel.

But besides that, it is a land which has a most strange and wonderful story of its own. No other country has so long a history of great Kings, and wise men, and brave soldiers; and in no other country can you see anything to compare with the great buildings, some of them most beautiful, all of them most wonderful, of which Egypt has so many. We have some old and interesting buildings in this country, and people go far to see cathedrals and castles that are perhaps five or six hundred years old, or even more; but in Egypt, buildings of that age are looked upon as almost new, and nobody pays very much attention to

them. For the great temples and tombs of Egypt were, many of them, hundreds of years old before the story of our Bible, properly speaking, begins.

The Pyramids, for instance, those huge piles that are still the wonder of the world, were far older than any building now standing in Europe, before Joseph was sold to be a slave in Potiphar's house. Hundreds upon hundreds of years before anyone had ever heard of the Greeks and the Romans, there were great Kings reigning in Egypt, sending out their armies to conquer Syria and the Soudan, and their ships to explore the unknown southern seas, and wise men were writing books which we can still read. When Britain was a wild, unknown island, inhabited only by savages as fierce and untaught as the South Sea Islanders, Egypt was a great and highly civilized country, full of great cities, with noble palaces and temples, and its people were wise and learned.

So in this little book I want to tell you something about this wonderful and interesting old country, and about the kind of life that people lived in it in those days of long ago, before most other lands had begun to waken up, or to have any history at all. First of all, let us try to get an idea of the land itself. It is a very remarkable thing that so many of the countries which have played a great part in the history of the world have been small countries. Our own Britain is not very big, though it has had a great story. Palestine, which has done more than any other country to make the world what it is to-day, was called "the least

of all lands." Greece, whose influence comes, perhaps, next after that of Palestine, is only a little hilly corner of Southern Europe. And Egypt, too, is comparatively a small land.

It looks a fair size when you see it on the map; but you have to remember that nearly all the land which is called Egypt on the map is barren sandy desert, or wild rocky hill-country, where no one can live. The real Egypt is just a narrow strip of land on either side of the great River Nile, sometimes only a mile or two broad altogether, never more than thirty miles broad, except near the mouth of the river, where it widens out into the fan-shaped plain called the Delta. Someone has compared Egypt to a lily with a crooked stem, and the comparison is very true. The long winding valley of the Nile is the crooked stem of the lily, and the Delta at the Nile mouth, with its wide stretch of fertile soil, is the flower; while, just below the flower, there is a little bud—a fertile valley called the Fayum.

Long before even Egyptian history begins, there was no bloom on the lily. The Nile, a far bigger river then than it is now, ran into the sea near Cairo, the modern capital of Egypt; and the land was nothing but the narrow valley of the river, bordered on either side by desert hills. But gradually, century by century, the Nile cut its way deeper down into the land, leaving banks of soil on either side between itself and the hills, and the mud which it brought down in its waters piled up at its mouth and pressed the sea back, till, at last, the Delta was formed, much as we see it now. This was long before Egypt had any story of its own; but even after history

begins the Delta was still partly marshy land, not long reclaimed from the sea, and the real Egyptians of the valley despised the people who lived there as mere marsh-dwellers. Even after the Delta was formed, the whole country was only about twice as large as Wales, and, though there was a great number of people in it for its size, the population was only, at the most, about twice as great as that of London.

An old Greek historian once said, "Egypt is the gift of the Nile," and it is perfectly true. We have seen how the great river made the country to begin with, cutting out the narrow valley through the hills, and building up the flat plain of the Delta. But the Nile has not only made the country; it keeps it alive. You know that Egypt has always been one of the most fertile lands in the world. Almost anything will grow there, and it produces wonderful crops of corn and vegetables, and, nowadays, of cotton. It was the same in old days. When Rome was the capital of the world, she used to get most of the corn to feed her hungry thousands from Egypt by the famous Alexandrian corn-ships; and you remember how, in the Bible story, Joseph's brethren came down from Palestine because, though there was famine there, there was "corn in Egypt." And yet Egypt is a land where rain is almost unknown. Sometimes there will come a heavy thunder-shower; but for month after month, year in and year out, there may be no rain at all.

How can a rainless country grow anything? The secret is the Nile. Every year, when the rains fall in the great lake-basin of

Central Africa, from which one branch of the great river comes, and on the Abyssinian hills, where the other branch rises, the Nile comes down in flood. All the lower lands are covered, and a fresh deposit of Nile mud is left upon them; and, though the river does not rise to the higher grounds, the water is led into big canals, and these, again, are divided up into little ones, till it circulates through the whole land, as the blood circulates through your arteries and veins. This keeps the land fertile, and makes up for the lack of rain.

Apart from its wonderful river, the country itself has no very striking features. It is rather a monotonous land—a long ribbon of green running through a great waste of yellow desert and barren hills. But the great charm that draws people's minds to Egypt, and gives the old land a never-failing interest, is its great story of the past, and all the relics of that story which are still to be seen.

In no other land can you see the real people and things of the days of long ago as you can see them in Egypt. Think how we should prize an actual building that had been connected with the story of King Arthur, if such a thing could be found in our country, and what wonderful romance would belong to the weapons, the actual shields and helmets, swords and lances, of the Knights of the Round Table, Lancelot and Tristram and Galahad—if only we could find them. Out there in Egypt you can see buildings compared with which King Arthur's Camelot would be only a thing of yesterday; and you can look, not only on

the weapons, but on the actual faces and forms of great Kings and soldiers who lived, and fought bravely for their country, hundreds of years before Saul and Jonathan and David began to fight the battles of Israel. You can see the pictures of how people lived in those far-away days, how their houses were built, how they traded and toiled, how they amused themselves, how they behaved in time of sorrow, how they worshipped God—all set down by themselves at the very time when they were doing these things. You can even see the games at which the children used to play, and the queer old-fashioned toys and dolls that they played with, and you can read the stories which their mothers and their nurses used to tell them.

These are the things which make this old land of Egypt so interesting to us all to-day; and I want to try to tell you about some of them, so that you may be able to have in your mind's eye a real picture of the life of those long past days.

CHAPTER II
A DAY IN THEBES

If any foreigner were wanting to get an idea of our country, and to see how our people live, I suppose the first place that he would go to would be London, because it is the capital of the whole country, and its greatest city; and so, if we want to learn something about Egypt, and how people lived there in those far-off days, we must try to get to the capital of the country, and see what is to be seen there.

Suppose, then, that we are no longer living in Britain in the twentieth century, but that somehow or other we have got away back into the past, far beyond the days of Jesus Christ, beyond even the times of Moses, and are living about 1,300 years before Christ. We have come from Tyre in a Phoenician galley, laden with costly bales of cloth dyed with Tyrian purple, and beautiful vessels wrought in bronze and copper, to sell in the markets of Thebes, the greatest city in Egypt. We have coasted along past Carmel and Joppa, and, after narrowly escaping being driven in a storm on the dangerous quicksand called the Syrtis, we have entered one of the mouths of the Nile. We have taken up an Egyptian pilot at the river mouth, and he stands on a little platform at the bow of the galley, and shouts his directions to the steersmen, who work the two big rudders, one on either side of

the ship's stern. The north wind is blowing strongly and driving us swiftly upstream, in spite of the current of the great river; so our weary oarsmen have shipped their oars, and we drive steadily southwards under our one big swelling sail.

At first we sail along through a broad flat plain, partly cultivated, and partly covered with marsh and marsh plants. By-and-by the green plain begins to grow narrower; we are coming to the end of the Delta, and entering upon the real valley of Egypt. Soon we pass a great city, its temples standing out clear against the deep blue sky, with their towering gateways, gay flags floating from tall flagstaves in front of them, and great obelisks pointing to the sky; and our pilot says that this is Memphis, one of the oldest towns in the country, and for long its capital. Not far from Memphis, three great pyramid-shaped masses of stone rise up on the river-bank, looking almost like mountains; and the pilot tells us that these are the tombs of some of the great Kings of long past days, and that all around them lie smaller pyramids and other tombs of Kings and great men.

But we are bound for a city greater even than Memphis, and so we never stop, but hasten always southward. Several days of steady sailing carry us past many towns that cluster near the river, past one ruined city, falling into mere heaps of stone and brick, which our pilot tells us was once the capital of a wicked King who tried to cast down all the old gods of Egypt, and to set up a new god of his own; and at last we see, far ahead of us, a huge cluster of buildings on both sides of the river, which marks a city

greater than we have ever seen.

As we sweep up the river we see that there are really two cities. On the east bank lies the city of the living, with its strong walls and towers, its enormous temples, and an endless crowd of houses of all sorts and sizes, from the gay palaces of the nobles to the mud huts of the poor people. On the west bank lies the city of the dead. It has neither streets nor palaces, and no hum of busy life goes up from it; but it is almost more striking than its neighbour across the river. The hills and cliffs are honeycombed with long rows of black openings, the doorways of the tombs where the dead of Thebes for centuries back are sleeping. Out on the plain, between the cliffs and the river, temple rises after temple in seemingly endless succession. Some of these temples are small and partly ruined, but some are very great and splendid; and, as the sunlight strikes upon them, it sends back flashes of gold and crimson and blue that dazzle the eyes.

Plate 2
THE GODDESS ISIS DANDLING THE KING. *Page 18*

But now our galley is drawing in towards the quay on the east side of the river, and in a few minutes the great sail comes thundering down, and, as the ship drifts slowly up to the quay, the mooring-ropes are thrown and made fast, and our long voyage is at an end. The Egyptian Custom-house officers come on board to examine the cargo, and collect the dues that have to be paid on it; and we watch them with interest, for they are quite different in appearance from our own hook-nosed, bearded sailors, with their thick many-coloured cloaks. These Egyptians are all clean shaven; some of them wear wigs, and some have their hair cut straight across their brows, while it falls thickly behind upon their necks in a multitude of little curls, which must have taken them no small trouble to get into order. Most wear nothing but a kilt of white linen; but the chief officer has a fine white cloak thrown over his shoulders; his linen kilt is stiffly starched, so that it stands out almost like a board where it folds over in front, and he wears a gilded girdle with fringed ends which hang down nearly to his knees. In his right hand he carries a long stick, which he is not slow to lay over the shoulders of his men when they do not obey his orders fast enough.

After a good deal of hot argument, the amount of the tax is settled and paid, and we are free to go up into the great town. We have not gone far before we find that life in Thebes can be

quite exciting. A great noise is heard from one of the narrow riverside streets, and a crowd of men comes rushing up with shouts and oaths. Ahead of them runs a single figure, whose writing-case, stuck in his girdle, marks him out as a scribe. He is almost at his last gasp, for he is stout and not accustomed to running; and he is evidently fleeing for his life, for the men behind him—rough, half-naked, ill-fed creatures of the working class—are chasing him with cries of anger, and a good deal of stone-throwing. Bruised and bleeding, he darts up to the gate of a handsome house whose garden-wall faces the street. He gasps out a word to the porter, and is quickly passed into the garden. The gate is slammed and bolted in the faces of his pursuers, who form a ring round it, shouting and shaking their fists.

In a little while the gate is cautiously unbarred, and a fine-looking man, very richly dressed, and followed by half a dozen well-armed negro guards, steps forward, and asks the workmen why they are here, making such a noise, and why they have chased and beaten his secretary. He is Prince Paser, who has charge of the Works Department of the Theban Government, and the workmen are masons employed on a large job in the cemetery of Thebes. They all shout at once in answer to the Prince's question; but by-and-by they push forward a spokesman, and he begins, rather sheepishly at first, but warming up as he goes along, to make their complaint to the great man.

He and his mates, he says, have been working for weeks. They have had no wages; they have not even had the corn and oil

which ought to be issued as rations to Government workmen. So they have struck work, and now they have come to their lord the Prince to entreat him either to give command that the rations be issued, or, if his stores are exhausted, to appeal to Pharaoh. "We have been driven here by hunger and thirst; we have no clothes, we have no oil, we have no food. Write to our lord the Pharaoh, that he may give us something for our sustenance." When the spokesman has finished his complaint, the whole crowd volubly assents to what he has said, and sways to and fro in a very threatening manner.

Prince Paser, however, is an old hand at dealing with such complaints. With a smiling face he promises that fifty sacks of corn shall be sent to the cemetery immediately, with oil to correspond. Only the workmen must go back to their work at once, and there must be no more chasing of poor Secretary Amen-nachtu. Otherwise, he can do nothing. The workmen grumble a little. They have been put off with promises before, and have got little good of them. But they have no leader bold enough to start a riot, and they have no weapons, and the spears and bows of the Prince's Nubians look dangerous. Finally they turn, and disappear, grumbling, down the street from which they came; and Prince Paser, with a shrug of his shoulders, goes indoors again. Whether the fifty sacks of corn are ever sent or not, is another matter. Strikes, you see, were not unknown, even so long ago as this.

CHAPTER III
A DAY IN THEBES—*Continued*

Having seen the settlement of the masons' strike, we wander up into the heart of the town. The streets are generally narrow and winding, and here and there the houses actually meet overhead, so that we pass out of the blinding sunlight into a sort of dark tunnel. Some of the houses are large and high; but even the largest make no display towards the street. They will be fine enough inside, with bright courts surrounded with trees, in the midst of which lies a cool pond of water, and with fine rooms decorated with gay hangings; but their outer walls are almost absolutely blank, with nothing but a heavy door breaking the dead line. We pass by some quarters where there is nothing but a crowd of mud huts, packed so closely together that there is only room for a single foot-passenger to thread his way through the narrow alleys between them. These are the workmen's quarters, and the heat and smell in them are so overpowering that one wonders how people can live in such places.

By-and-by we come out into a more open space—one of the bazaars of the city—where business is in full swing. The shops are little shallow booths quite open to the front; and all the goods are spread out round the shopkeeper, who squats cross-legged in the middle of his property, ready to serve his customers, and

invites the attention of the passers-by by loud explanations of the goodness and cheapness of his wares. All sorts of people are coming and going, for a Theban crowd holds representatives of nearly every nation known. Here are the townsfolk, men and women, out to buy supplies for their houses, or to exchange the news of the day; peasants from the villages round about, bringing in vegetables and cattle to barter for the goods which can only be got in the town; fine ladies and gentlemen, dressed elaborately in the latest Court fashion, with carefully curled wigs, long pleated robes of fine transparent linen, and dainty, brightly-coloured sandals turned up at the toes. At one moment you rub shoulders with a Hittite from Kadesh, a conspicuous figure, with his high-peaked cap, pale complexion, and heavy, pointed boots. He looks round him curiously, as if thinking that Thebes would be a splendid town to plunder. Then a priest of high rank goes by, with shaven head, a panther skin slung across his shoulder over his white robe, and a roll of papyrus in his hand. A Sardinian of the bodyguard swaggers along behind him, the ball and horns on his helmet flashing in the sunlight, his big sword swinging in its sheath as he walks; and a Libyan bowman, with two bright feathers in his leather skull-cap, looks disdainfully at him as he shoulders his way through the crowd.

All around us people are buying and selling. Money, as we know it, has not yet been invented, and nearly all the trade is done by means of exchange. When it comes to be a question of how many fish have to be given for a bed, or whether a load of

onions is good value for a chair, you can imagine that there has to be a good deal of argument. Besides, the Egyptian dearly loves bargaining for the mere excitement of the thing, and so the clatter of tongues is deafening. Here and there one or two traders have advanced a little beyond the old-fashioned way of barter, and offer, instead of goods, so many rings of copper, silver, or gold wire. A peasant who has brought in a bullock to sell is offered 90 copper "uten" (as the rings are called) for it; but he loudly protests that this is robbery, and after a long argument he screws the merchant up to 111 "uten," with 8 more as a luck-penny, and the bargain is clinched. Even then the rings have still to be weighed that he may be sure he is not being cheated. So a big pair of balances is brought out; the "uten" are heaped into one scale, and in the other are piled weights in the shape of bulls' heads. Finally, he is satisfied, and picks up his bag of rings; but the wily merchant is not done with him yet. He spreads out various tempting bargains before the eyes of the countryman, and, before the latter leaves the shop, most of the copper rings have found their way back again to the merchant's sack.

A little farther on, the Tyrian traders, to whom the cargo of our galley is consigned, have their shop. Screens, made of woven grass, shelter it from the sun, and under their shade all sorts of gorgeous stuffs are displayed, glowing with the deep rich colours, of which the Tyrians alone have the secret since the sack of Knossos destroyed the trade of Crete. Beyond the Tyrian booth, a goldsmith is busily employed in his shop. Necklets and bracelets

of gold and silver, beautifully inlaid with all kinds of rich colours, hang round him; and he is hard at work, with his little furnace and blowpipe, putting the last touches to the welding of a bracelet, for which a lady is patiently waiting.

In one corner of the bazaar stands a house which makes no display of wares, but, nevertheless, seems to secure a constant stream of customers. Workmen slink in at the door, as though half ashamed of themselves, and reappear, after a little, wiping their mouths, and not quite steady in their gait. A young man, with pale and haggard face, swaggers past and goes in, and, as he enters the door, one bystander nudges another and remarks: "Pentuere is going to have a good day again; he will come to a bad end, that young man."

By-and-by the door opens again, and Pentuere comes out staggering. He looks vacantly round, and tries to walk away; but his legs refuse to carry him, and, after a stumble or two, he falls in a heap and lies in the road, a pitiful sight. The passers-by jeer and laugh at him as he lies helpless; but one decent-looking man points him out to his young son, and says: "See this fellow, my son, and learn not to drink beer to excess. Thou dost fall and break thy limbs, and bespatter thyself with mud, like a crocodile, and no one reaches out a hand to thee. Thy comrades go on drinking, and say, 'Away with this fellow, who is drunk.' If anyone should seek thee on business, thou art found lying in the dust like a little child."

But in spite of much wise advice, the Egyptian, though

generally temperate, is only too fond of making "a good day," as he calls it, at the beerhouse. Even fine ladies sometimes drink too much at their great parties, and have to be carried away very sick and miserable. Worst of all, the very judges of the High Court have been known to take a day off during the hearing of a long case, in order to have a revel with the criminals whom they were trying; and it is not so long since two of them had their noses cut off, as a warning to the rest against such shameful conduct.

Sauntering onwards, we gradually get near to the sacred quarter of the town, and can see the towering gateways and obelisks of the great temples over the roofs of the houses. Soon a great crowd comes towards us, and the sounds of trumpets and flutes are heard coming from the midst of it. Inquiring what is the meaning of the bustle, we are told that one of the images of Amen, the great god of Thebes, is being carried in procession as a preliminary to an important service which is to take place in the afternoon, and at which the King is going to preside. Stepping back under the doorway of a house, we watch the procession go past. After a group of musicians and singers, and a number of women who are dancing as they go, and shaking curious metal rattles, there comes a group of six men, who form the centre of the whole crowd, and on whom the eyes of all are fixed.

They are tall, spare, keen-looking men, their heads clean shaven, their bodies wrapped in pure white robes of the beautiful Egyptian linen. On their shoulders they carry, by means of two long poles, a model of a Nile boat, in the midst of which rises

a little shrine. The shrine is carefully draped round with a veil, so as to hide the god from curious eyes. But just in front of the doorway where we are standing a small stone pillar rises from the roadway, and when the bearers come to this point, the bark of the god is rested on the top of the pillar. Two censer-bearers come forward, and swing their censers, wafting clouds of incense round the shrine; a priest lifts up his voice, loudly intoning a hymn of praise to the great god who creates and sustains all things; and a few of the by-standers lay before the bark offerings of flowers, fruit, and eatables of various kinds. Then comes the solemn moment. Amid breathless silence, the veil of the shrine is slowly drawn aside, and the faithful can see a little wooden image, about 18 inches high, adorned with tall plumes, carefully dressed, and painted with green and black. The revelation of this little doll, to a Theban crowd the most sacred object in all the world, is hailed with shouts of wonder and reverence. Then the veil is drawn again, the procession passes on, and the streets are left quiet for awhile.

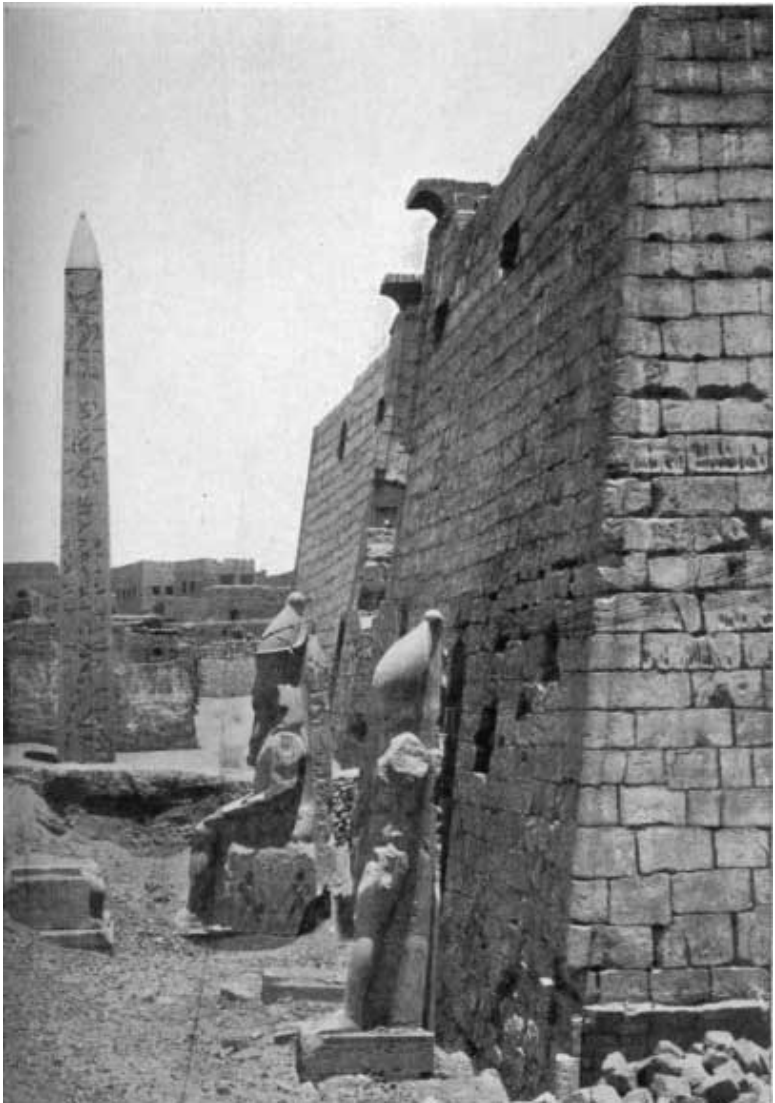

Plate 3

THE GREAT GATE OF THE TEMPLE OF LUXOR, WITH OBELISK. *Pages 74, 75*

We are reminded that, if we wish to get a meal before starting out to see Pharaoh passing in procession to the temple, we had better lose no time, and so we turn our faces riverwards again, and wander down through the endless maze of streets to where our galley is moored at the quay.

CHAPTER IV
PHARAOH AT HOME

The time is coming on now for the King to go in state to the great temple at Karnak to offer sacrifice, and as we go up to the palace to see him come forth in all his glory, let me tell you a little about him and the kind of life he leads. Pharaoh, of course, is not his real name; it is not even his official title; it is just a word which is used to describe a person who is so great that people scarcely venture to call him by his proper name. Just as the Turks nowadays speak of the "Sublime Porte," when they mean the Sultan and his Government, so the Egyptians speak of "Per-o," or Pharaoh, as we call it, which really signifies "Great House," when they mean the King.

For the King of Egypt is a very great man indeed; in fact, his people look upon him, and he looks upon himself, as something more than a man. There are many gods in Egypt; but the god whom the people know best, and to whom they pay the most reverence, is their King. Ever since there have been Kings in the country, and that is a very long time now, the reigning monarch has been looked upon as a kind of god manifest in the flesh. He calls himself "Son of the Sun"; in the temples you will see pictures of his childhood, where great goddesses dandle the young god upon their knees (Plate 2). Divine honours are paid,

and sacrifices offered to him; and when he dies, and goes to join his brother-gods in heaven, a great temple rises to his memory, and hosts of priests are employed in his worship. There is just one distinction made between him and the other gods. Amen at Thebes, Ptah at Memphis, and all the rest of the crowd of divinities, are called "the great gods." Pharaoh takes a different title. He is called "the good god."

At present "the good god" is Ramses II. Of course, that is only one part of his name; for, like all the other Pharaohs, he has a list of titles that would fill a page. His subjects in Thebes have not seen very much of him for a long time, for there has been so much to do away in Syria, that he has built another capital at Tanis, which the Hebrews call Zoan, down between the Delta and the eastern frontier, and spends most of his time there. People who have been down the river tell us great wonders about the beauty of the new town, its great temple, and the huge statue of the King, 90 feet high, which stands before the temple gate. But Thebes is still the centre of the nation's life, and now, when it is growing almost certain that there will be another war with those vile Hittites in the North of Syria, he has come up to the great city to take counsel with his brother-god, Amen, and to make arrangements for gathering his army. The royal palace is in a constant bustle, with envoys coming and going, and counsellors and generals continually passing in and out with reports and orders.

Outside, the palace is not so very imposing. The Egyptians

built their temples to last for ever; but the palaces of their Kings were meant to serve only for a short time. The new King might not care for the old King's home, and so each Pharaoh builds his house according to his own taste, of light materials. It will serve his turn, and his successor may build another for himself. A high wall, with battlements, towers, and heavy gates, surrounds it; for, though Pharaoh is a god, his subjects are sometimes rather difficult to keep in order. Plots against the King have not been unknown in the past; and on at least one occasion, a great Pharaoh of bygone days had to spring from his couch and fight single-handed for his life against a crowd of conspirators who had forced an entrance into the palace while he was enjoying his siesta. So since then Pharaoh has found it better to trust in his strong walls, and in the big broadswords of his faithful Sardinian guardsmen, than in any divinity that may belong to himself.

Within the great boundary wall lie pleasant gardens, gay with all sorts of flowers, and an artificial lake shows its gleaming water here and there through the trees and shrubs. The palace itself is all glittering white stucco on the outside. A high central door leads into a great audience hall, glowing with colour, its roof supported by painted pillars in the form of lotus-stalks; and on either side of this lie two smaller halls. Behind the audience chamber are two immense dining-rooms, and behind these come the sleeping apartments of the numerous household. Ramses has a multitude of wives, and a whole army of sons and daughters, and it takes no small space to house them all. The bedroom of

the great King himself stands apart from the other rooms, and is surrounded by banks of flowers in full bloom.

The Son of the Sun has had a busy day already. He has had many letters and despatches to read and consider. Some of the Syrian vassal-princes have sent clay tablets, covered with their curious arrow-headed writing, giving news of the advance of the Hittites, and imploring the help of the Egyptian army; and now the King is about to give audience, and to consider these with his great nobles and Generals. At one end of the reception hall stands a low balcony, supported on gaily-painted wooden pillars which end in capitals of lotus-flowers. The front of this balcony is overlaid with gold, and richly decorated with turquoise and lapis lazuli. Here the King will show himself to his subjects, accompanied by his favourite wife, Queen Nefertari, and some of the young Princes and Princesses. The folding doors of the audience chamber are thrown open, and the barons, the provincial governors, and the high officers of the army and the State throng in to do homage to their master.

In a few moments the glittering crowd is duly arranged, a door opens at the back of the balcony, and the King of the Two Lands, Lord of the Vulture and the Snake, steps forth with his Queen and family. In earlier times, whenever the King appeared, the assembled nobles were expected to fall on their faces and kiss the ground before him. Fashion has changed, however, and now the great folks, at all events, are no longer required to "smell the earth." As Pharaoh enters the balcony, the nobles bow profoundly, and raise their arms as if in prayer to "the good god." Then, in silent reverence, they wait until it shall please their lord to speak.

Ramses sweeps his glance over the crowd, singles out the General in command of the Theban troops, and puts a question to him as to the readiness of his division—the picked division of the army. The soldier steps forward with a deep bow; but it is not Court manners for him to answer his lord's question directly. Instead, he begins by reciting a little psalm of praise, which tells of the King's greatness, his valour and skill in war, and asserts that wherever his horses tread his enemies flee before him and perish. This little piece of flattery over, the General begins, "O King, my master," and in a few sensible words gives the information required. So the audience goes on, counsellor after counsellor coming forward at the royal command, reciting his little hymn, and then giving his opinion on such matters as his master suggests to him. At last the council is over, the King gives

orders to his equerry to prepare his chariot for the procession to the temple, and, as he turns to leave the audience chamber, the assembled nobles once more bow profoundly, and raise their arms in adoration.

After a short delay, the great gates of the boundary wall of the palace are opened; a company of spearmen, in quilted leather kilts and leather skull-caps, marches out, and takes position a short distance from the gateway. Behind them comes a company of the Sardinians of the guard, heavily armed, with bright helmets, broad round shields, quilted corselets, and long, heavy, two-edged swords. They range themselves on either side of the roadway, and stand like statues, waiting for the appearance of Pharaoh. There is a whir of chariot-wheels, and the royal chariot sweeps through the gateway, and sets off at a good round pace towards the temple. The spearmen in front start at the double, and the guardsmen, in spite of their heavy equipment, keep pace with their royal master on either side.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.