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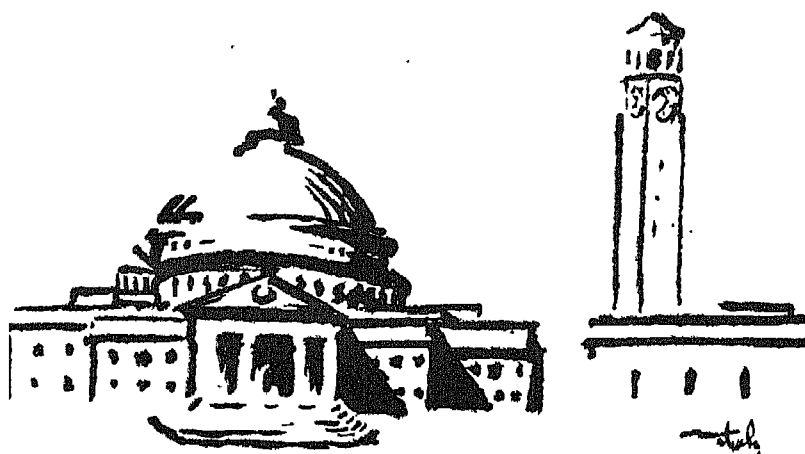
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CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

by

M. M. MOSHARRAFA



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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Mosharrafa is very well known in Exeter, and deserves to be well known in the rest of England. He joined the University College in order to acquire standing as an English scholar, and with the further aim of being an interpreter and reconciler between Egypt and England. His long and happy stay in Exeter was marred by a great misfortune: he fell a victim to chronic arthritis of the severest kind. Nothing daunted in spirit, nothing diminished in imaginative energy, he pursued his work buoyantly and successfully to its conclusion. He returned presently to Cairo, where he held a post in the University for some years. He now occupies a post in the Egyptian Institute in London which gives him a congenial opportunity of liaison service between his two countries.

I have read through his booklet, which I find as engaging as it is modest, with sincere pleasure. Unlike most booklets, unlike any, indeed, that have come my way, it reads like a poem. Towards the end Mr. Mosharrafa speaks of certain writings by Egyptians in English and French as not having as yet got beyond the stage of being thought "literary curiosities". Readers may judge of his own writing for themselves. I find his English vivid and balanced and rhythmic.

Within the narrow limits of the booklet Mr. Mosharrafa writes methodically, but not in the exhaustive style of gazetteer or guide-book. All the main topics, ancient and modern, are here, touched on briefly and suggestively. It will be a strange reader who does not find his interest aroused again and again to the point of promising himself to make a study of this or that aspect of Egyptian life or history.

Mr. Mosharrafa is concerned to forecast how Egypt will come to terms with various features of Western life. His view is hopeful on the whole. The roots of humane culture, he thinks, are too old and too deep in the valley of the Nile to suffer in essentials from the Western

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

influences. "Culture", he says, "is as natural a pursuit of man as work or play." He proves it for ancient Egypt from the efflorescence of art in and around the life of the *fallahin*. Their modern descendants need, of course, more science, machines, and organisations in daily work, need all and every aid to raise them up out of poverty and the restraints of poverty. He takes a view of culture that some may think unduly trustful. But he has his grounds in the retrospect of immemorial centuries, the rich achievement, the sunlit inspiriting air of Egypt, the bounties of nature, and the gift of happiness and humanity in the masses of the land.

This versatile and stimulating discourse, which nowhere flags, deserves to be very widely read.

JOHN MURRAY

*University College,
Exeter,
February 1946*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is one of a series of booklets designed to give the English reader an idea of the modern Egyptian people against a background of their ancient and rather chequered history. What is attempted here is a cultural survey claiming no academic precision or orthodoxy. In dealing with history, I thought it best to ramble carelessly without regard to sequence of time or order of development, but always to return to the present with any threads of continuity I might have picked up and to trace them in the complex social pattern of modern Egypt. In this manner, I hope to correct the European habit of focusing attention on our ancient history whenever Egypt is discussed. Although this booklet deals mainly with the Pharaonic culture, whenever I found a tradition which has continued through the Islamic and Greek periods down to the present, I have made a passing reference to them. But the legacy of those two will be dealt with separately in a later pamphlet.

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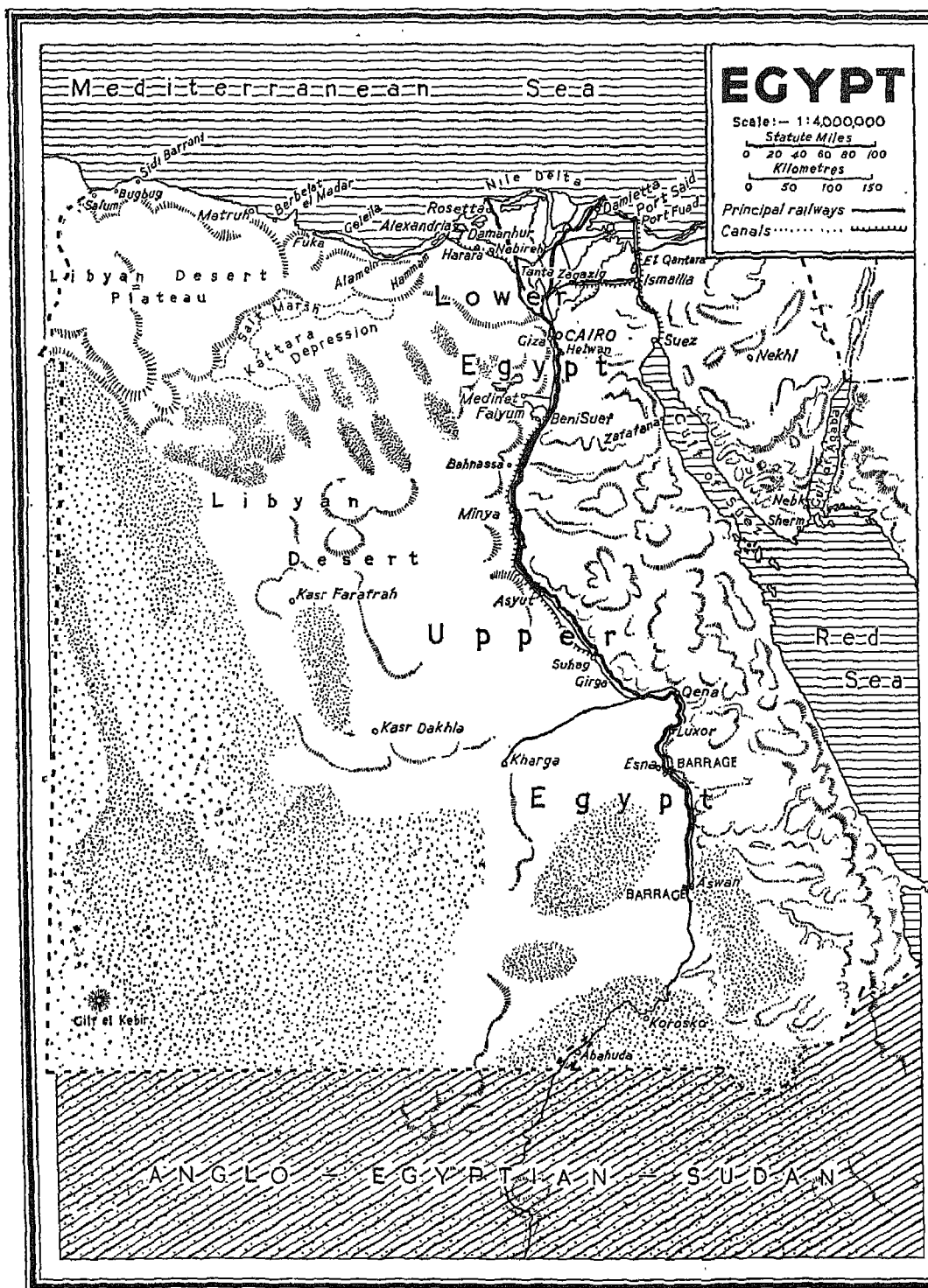
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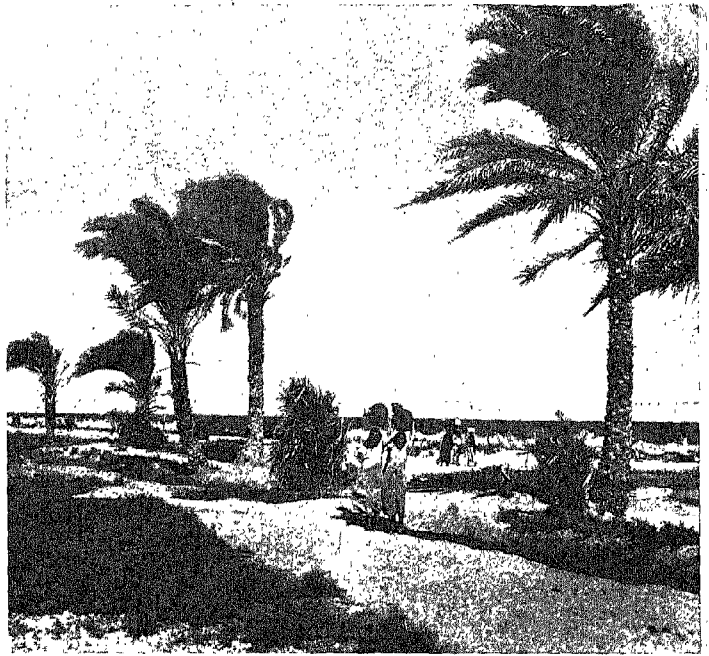
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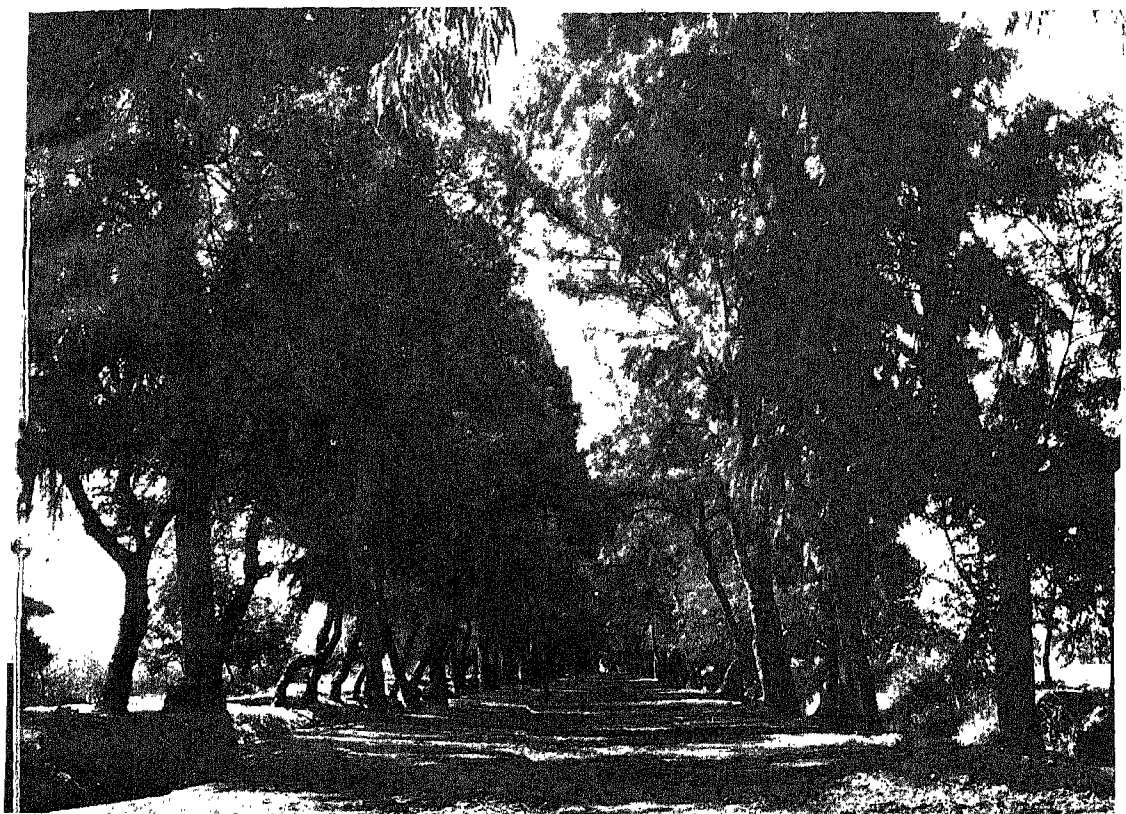
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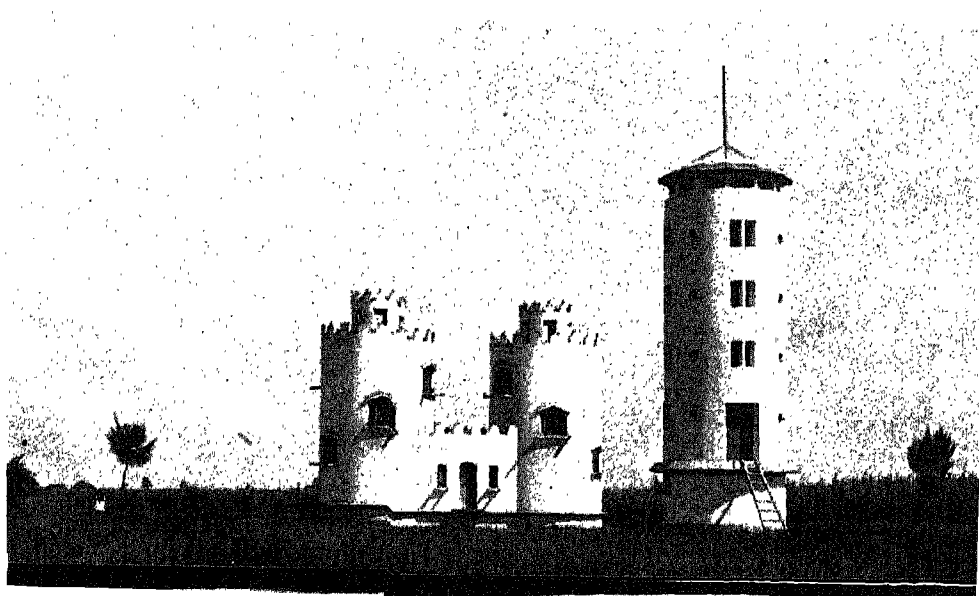
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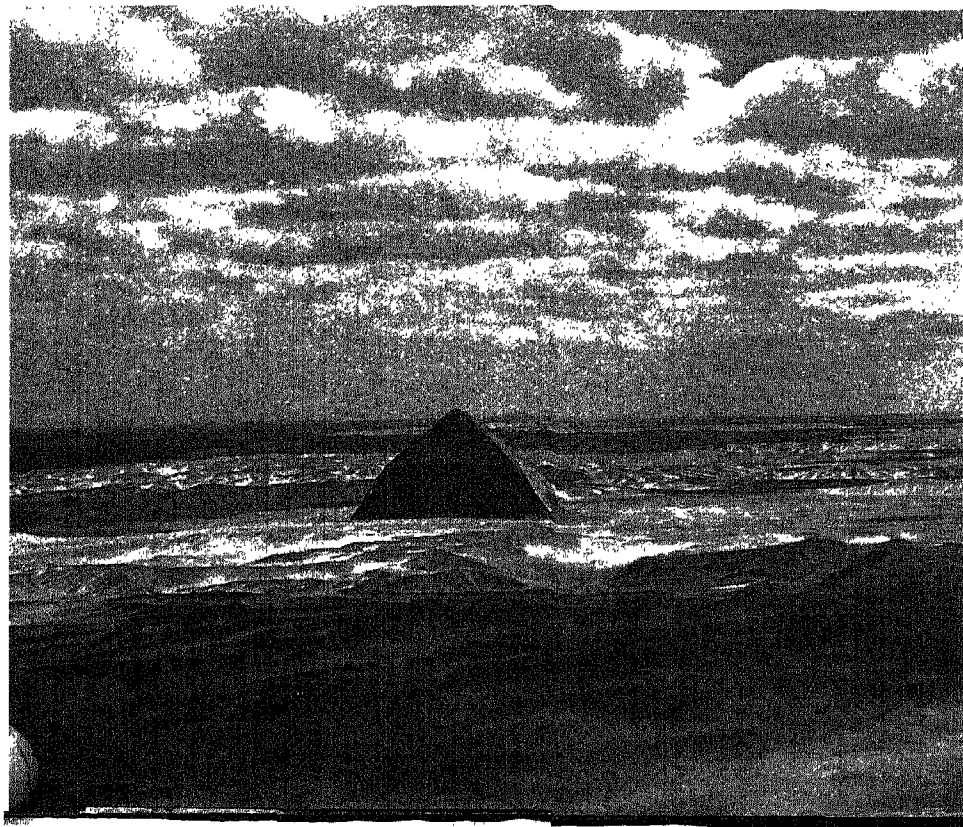
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ONE OF THE MANY PYRAMIDS SCATTERED ON THE FRINGE OF THE DESERT



1

Geography

Geographically, Egypt is the north-eastern corner of that barren vastness extending from North Africa to Asia, interrupted by the Red Sea and its two gulfs of Suez and Aqaba. The total area of Egypt is more than $7\frac{1}{2}$ times that of England but the cultivated portion is only one quarter of the area of this country. The eastern half of the Lybian Desert, the Peninsula of Sinai, together with the sun-scorched hills along the west coast of the Red Sea as far south as latitude 23—all these practically waterless spaces belong to Egypt. The area actually covered by water—i.e. the Nile, the lakes and canals—is approximately $\frac{1}{12}$ of the whole.

But to her own people, the *fallahin*, who know her as *Massr*, Egypt is that section of the Nile basin sloping northward for a distance of about 750 miles from the Second Cataract to the Mediterranean. It is a valley with a crust of fertile silt, tilled by the peasants, descendants of one of the first communities of hunters ever to settle on the land and to discover civilisation for themselves.

Egypt is the narrowest country in the world. The cultivated fields rarely reach out into the desert for more than eight miles on either bank of the river, except in Fayoum Province and in northern or *Lower Egypt* where an extensive system of canals and aqueducts makes it possible to lay out green fields scores of miles east and west of the two branches of the Delta. Tracing the course of the Nile from the air one sees what an insignificant green line the valley makes in the vast pattern of grey dune shadow and brown chalk rock drawn on the sands of geographical Egypt.

have outpaced the native means of production in a countryside which should be made ready for them, and the sooner the better.

Here and there, one may find buffaloes bathing in a canal or donkeys resting in the shadow of an olive tree. The olive, the sycamore, and the fig remain in rural Egypt from ancient times because they are useful trees. The *fallah* has not much use for trees which are merely decorative, but since the days of Khedive Ismail, a great number of foreign trees have been imported for transplantation, not only in the cities but also along the main roads. Chief among these foreign trees are: The Flamboyant, the Poinciana, the Jacaranda, the Eucalyptus, the Willow, the Poinsettia, and the Bougainvillia.

The peasant women share the work of their menfolk in fields, in common with all peasants, and they too rest from their labour under the shade of trees, to feed their babies or to share a meal with their husbands. Very few women can walk as gracefully as our peasant women do, with their water pitchers poised on their heads. Very few women share their lives more fully with their menfolk.

Canals remain the principal method of irrigating the land, the water-wheel is used in farms where the ground is too high or too distant from the main waterways. The water-wheel is constructed on a well or beside a canal where the water-level is ten feet or more deep. The number of acres it can irrigate per day varies between one and two acres, according to the number of oxen turning it and the distance of lift. The cracking of these wheels—the *sakias*—is not in itself a pleasing sound, at least to Europeans, but in the evening it blends pleasantly enough with the croaking of frogs and the high-pitched chirp of the Egyptian cricket.

B. DESERT

To the Egyptian peasant, the desert is not a part of his land. The edge of his green fields means to him what the shores of this island mean to the Englishman, and the desert belongs to him in the same mystic way that the sea belongs to the English. There, the Egyptian buried and still buries his dead—just as the Saxons launched their

LANDSCAPE

dead heroes in burning ships, just as the Ancient Egyptians built pyramids to their Pharaohs on the desert sand.

The population of Egypt is over 17,000,000. With a slight calculation one may see that Egypt is almost twice as overcrowded as England, a problem which will have to be faced soon, in view of the increasing birthrate.

The population of Cairo is just under 1,500,000. Cairo comes from the Arabic name Al-Qāhirah but among the people the Capital is called Massr which is the same name as that of the country. It is situated a few miles South of the Nile Delta, and it extends now over the two banks of the river.

The two aspects, the valley and the desert, have given a one-sided picture of Egypt to a great many Englishmen. In the First World War most of the fighting in the Middle East took place in the region of the Suez Canal—in Palestine and Syria. Most of the British soldiers were stationed either in the valley or in the north-eastern corner of Egypt. The soldiers' impression of the country was one of flat square fields, of lakes and scrubby vegetation. In the Second World War the Western Desert was the main field of action in Africa. With the British soldier who took part in the desert campaigns, Egypt has left the impression of burning sand, stinging flies, and bitterly cold nights.

To the modern educated Egyptian, the desert and the valley are gradually losing their sharp line of division. The advance of science and the introduction of machinery have made reaction to environment in simple accordance with sense-impression a thing of the past. If industry can harness water, coal, and steel in the service of man, why should it not utilise the incessant flow of sun rays, wasted in grinding the face of the desert into sand, or the dry winds which raise duststorms over the valley, breeding eye, throat, and skin diseases? Could not this destructive energy be conserved, disciplined, and eventually released to be constructively applied in turning the desert into green fields and in saving the Egyptian *fallah* the sweating struggle that makes his life a burden?

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

The Ancient Egyptians made use of the north wind and the contrary current of the Nile to sail up or drift down the length of Egypt; from the desert they mined gold and copper and quarried basalt and alabaster. They cut canals, first to drain the valley quickly during the flood, then as a means of irrigation and lastly for navigation. They turned a depression at Fayoum into a reservoir which eventually became the lake of *Qaroun* and they joined the Nile with the Red Sea. These were indeed great achievements, but one cannot live on past glories. The modern Egyptians have recently filled that lake with fish, partly for consumption, partly for the breeding of a species which thrives on the larvae of the malaria-carrying mosquito. There are still other depressions which could be developed into the fresh-water lakes and woodlands of which Egypt has so great a need.

These are some of the problems which occupy the mind of the modern Egyptian. Already he sees the trucks and engineers of the prospecting American and European companies searching for oil, iron, and phosphate under the sands of his desert; already he knows that there are enough oil wells by the Red Sea to supply the whole of Egypt. His outlook on the desert is changing.

According to the latest statistics 1944, the mineral wealth of the country already exploited is 0/005 of the total. Oil is found along the Red Sea coast chiefly near Ghardaka and Ras Garib where the 1944 yield was 3,328,460 tons. Phosphates are mined near Safaja, Qussier, and Sikaia where the yield is approximately half a million tons. Iron is found both by the Red Sea and the Aswan district. The eastern desert has also crome, tungsten, lead, and sulphur.

3

Egyptian Types

A study of the Pharaonic sculpture and mural paintings make it clear that the modern Egyptians have kept their characteristic features throughout the centuries. The Egyptian physiognomy has persisted in spite of many alien fusions and conquests, but besides this predominant type there is also the Nubian. From time immemorial there lived on the southern borders of Egypt the tribes of Nubia—one of the most handsome people in the world. They are tall, slender, with almost Grecian features and oval faces, with a dark bronze tan. Travelling northward from Nubia, one finds the Egyptian type—the broad cheek-bones, the almond-shaped black eyes, the full lips and the handsome nose. The farther north one moves, the lighter becomes the complexion of the *fallabin* until it shades into the dark olive of the inhabitants of the *Giza* province to the south of Cairo. This may not sound accurate to the Europeans familiar with Upper Egypt, but they should take into account that under the tanning rays of the sub-tropical sun, the face of the Egyptian is much darker than his body; the ever-present dust which is inevitably attracted by the skin of the *fallah* sweating as he works in his field, gives the impression of a very dark skin and lustreless hair.

Among other factors accounting for the varying physiognomy and complexion are:

- (a) The perpetual shifting of the rural population from north to south and vice versa, either by reason of trade or the demand for agricultural labour.
- (b) The permanent settlement of nomad Bedouins in the valley and the merging of Turkish, Greek, and Syrian landowners with the Egyptian peasantry through economic stress.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

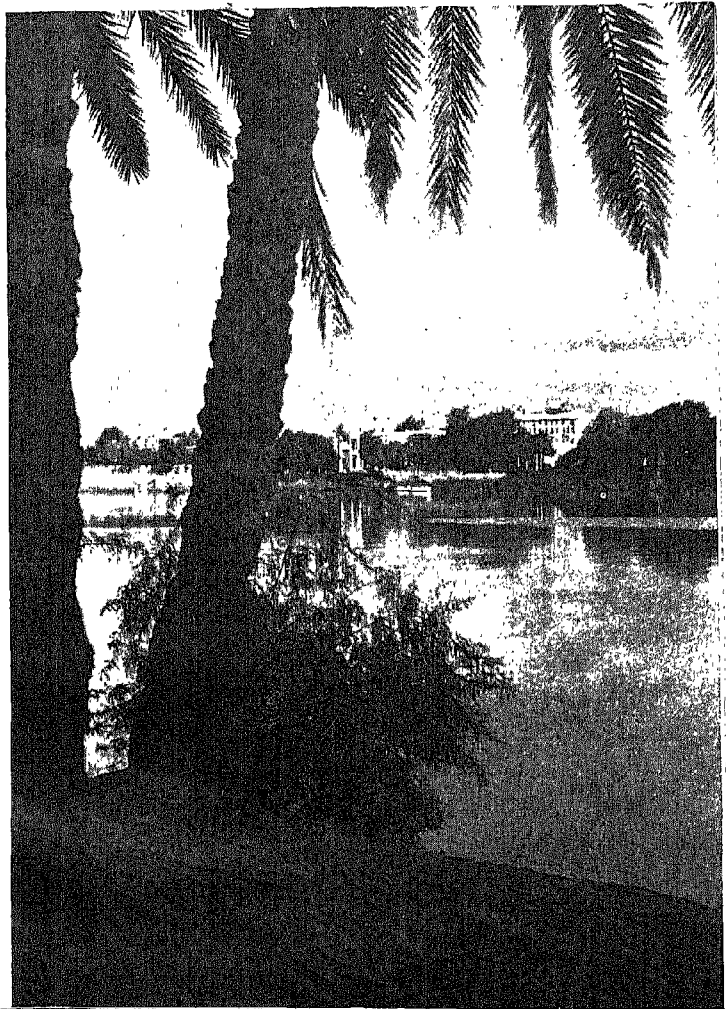
It is not uncommon to see families and even villages hundreds of miles south of Cairo, with a fair-haired, light-eyed population.

During the days of the slave trade and the reconquest of the Sudan by the Egyptian Army towards the end of the last century, a considerable number of male and female slaves were imported from Abyssinia and the Sudan. Islam is probably the most successful religion in eradicating colour or race prejudice. The free inter-marriage between slave owners and slaves in some of the provinces of Upper Egypt, accounts for the fuzzy-haired people with semi-negroid features to be found in the south. To a lesser extent traces of negroid features and dark skin may be seen in the north as well, but according to statistics made by Egyptian Army authorities, negroid blood never exceeds 2 per cent in any part of the country.

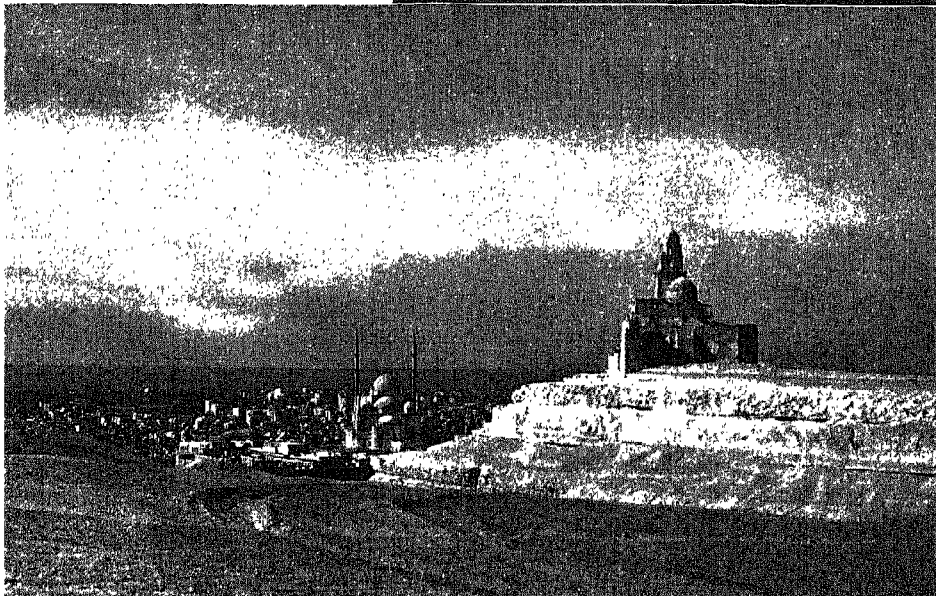
In the Delta area with its lakes, clouds, and wider stretches of field, with its palm groves and trees and the Mediterranean north wind blowing almost all the year round, the Egyptian *fallah* resembles in complexion the southern Italian or the Spaniard. But here the foreign influx which changes the characteristics of the native inhabitant is different, being composed mainly of Syrian, Greek, and Turkish emigrants. Generally speaking, the Copts intermarried with the Greek and Syrian Christians and the Moslems with the Turkish and Syrian Moslems. The result is that the people living on the coast more closely resemble the people of the Mediterranean basin than their own countrymen in, let us say, the *Assuan* province.

The Egyptian attains an average height of 5 ft. 7 in. He has fine teeth and eyes, lustrous black hair, and well-shaped limbs. But there is considerable evidence that the modern Egyptian could be taller, were it not for malnutrition and child labour. The woman in rural districts all over Egypt carry themselves with a dignity and a grace unmatched in any European country. Their work in the fields with their menfolk, or their frugal diet, and the habit of carrying water pitchers on their heads, give them this grace of movement and a slenderness which unfortunately too often betokens indifferent health.

9. THE NILE, CAIRO



10. CAIRO FROM THE
MOKATTAM HILLS



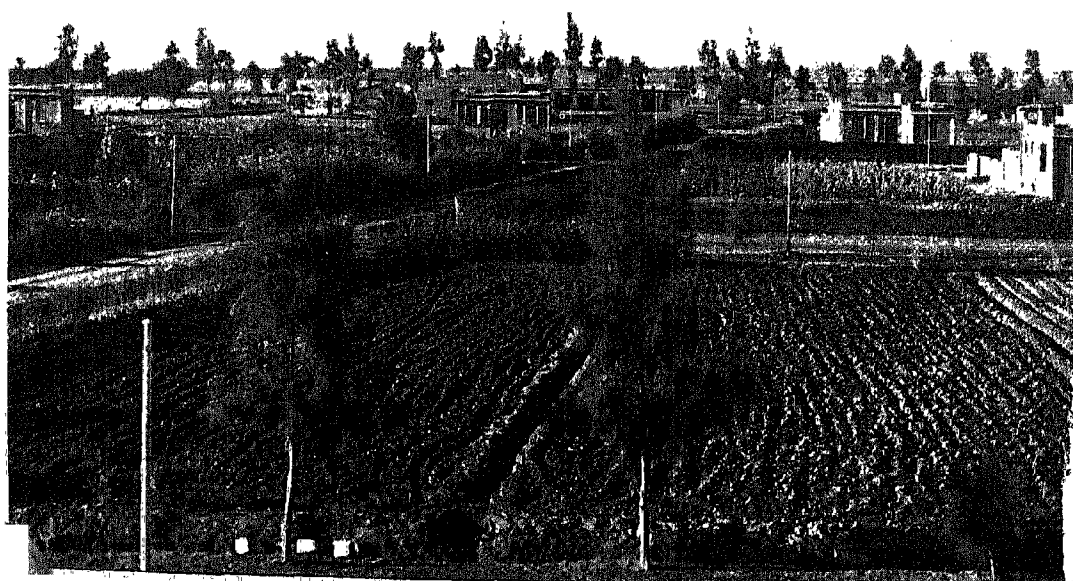


11. TYPICAL SUDANESE GIRL



12. TYPICAL EGYPTIAN GIRL

13. AN EXPERIMENTAL FARM



NATIONAL CHARACTER

That the Egyptian people have more or less preserved the characteristics of their Pharaonic ancestors up to the present time is probably due to the fact that rural Egypt has always been the main reservoir which fed the cities with inhabitants. With the exception of the Arab conquerors, foreigners coming to Egypt settled in the cities. The Arab conquerors, were not settlers at all, they were Bedouin tribes who lived and still live in tents on the outskirts of the valley. They had blood theories and nomadic habits which kept them from intermarriage with the *fallahin*. Only the aristocracy—the army generals and the tribe leaders who came in the wake of the conquest—settled in the cities to trade. There is this difference between the Arab and the English aristocrat. Whereas the English aristocrat despised trade and settled in the country where the baron became the squire, the Arab aristocracy despised agriculture and pursued commerce. The Arab aristocrat of the seventh century, when he came out of the desert at the head of his clan to conquer Egypt or Syria, eventually became the merchant prince of Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad.

With each invasion, the influx of foreign blood would alter the Egyptian physiognomy in the cities, but with succeeding generations of emigrants from rural districts, the foreign characteristics became submerged and the national type once more predominated.

4

National Character

What has been said of the physique of the Egyptian national type is more or less true of their character and habits. Character and habits are, broadly speaking, a corollary to occupation and the people's means of production. All through their history the Egyptians have been an agricultural people with gregarious habits. This explains the industrialised Europeans' idea of the Egyptians being conservative, slow, or even unprogressive. Personally, I have never met an Egyptian farmer or peasant who opposes the use of modern agricultural methods and machinery. The reason he does not use them is that he can afford neither to experiment nor to buy the machinery.

The country folk in Egypt are so eager to educate their children that they often deprive themselves of the necessities of life in order to get them into the few government schools available. If through hard work or by luck, a peasant becomes a comfortable small-holder, he needs no inducement to acquire clean habits and clothing. He soon avails himself of such modern amenities as he can afford, which often include a radio set and a modern shower-bath. In fact, the *fallah* is neither conservative nor unprogressive, but simply poor. During the six years of this war, over half a million peasants left their fields to join the workshops and labour services of the British and American armies, and in a remarkably short time they adapted themselves to a highly mechanised environment, learning and performing skilled tasks at the incentive of better pay.

The Egyptian peasant is sensitive, shy, and hardworking. He has a keen sense of humour which helps him considerably through his short life of toil and privation. In common with all Egyptians he is exceedingly sociable. Though politely reserved with strangers, he possesses the rare gift of becoming very intimate with his own country-

men in a short time, this trait in the national character, so obvious in the city cafés and the public places of entertainment in Egypt, has sometimes been a source of resentment to the reserved Englishman. The reserve of the Englishman is perhaps a trait encouraged by industrialisation, whereas sociability is promoted by agricultural pursuits. In commerce as well as in industry one may lose considerable material advantage by lack of reserve. In a world of patents, competition, trade secrets, and profits accruing from monopolies, success depends upon reticence. Again, in factories a skilled worker has to concentrate upon what he is doing and do it quickly enough to allow his employer a margin of profit. He cannot afford to indulge in the gossip which helps rather than hinders the worker in the field. He lives in towns where trains and buses (or a chill through waiting for them) have to be caught, where streets have to be crossed with an eye on the traffic. Is it a virtue where there can only be the "quick and the dead" to choose to be one or the other? And is not the virtue of one class sometimes the economics of another?

Anyhow, in the work of an Egyptian peasant there are very few things to do in an hour which may not be done within a week without detriment; and I have known crops in Egypt to escape devastation by pests through the lack of a sense of time in the *fallah* and his sowing a month later than he is told.

It may help the English reader to get rid of the stigmatic flavour of such words as unprogressive and backward, by working out for himself the relation between plant growing and animal breeding to the character of, say, a Devonshire farm labourer on the one hand, and the impact of the machine on the character of a Yorkshire mill worker on the other.

In so far as the modern Egyptian still pursues agriculture, he yet retains most of the characteristic traits of his ancestors. There is a love of gaiety and adornment, of music and dancing; there is a lightness of heart, a slowness of movement, a sense of fate and a surprising capacity for suffering which preserve the continuity or the Egyptian temperament. But as we become industrialised we inevitably acquire industrial habits, morals, and modes of thinking.

5

Social Evolution

The conditions imposed by nature upon a community to produce food and reproduce itself have made it inevitable that the Nile should force its character upon the people. As production evolves and eventually solves its own problems the people in turn force their character upon the Nile. In this process, which has gone on for millenniums, the face of Egypt has changed from wild swamps into fields, from mud huts built on silt mounds into city life with all that it entails of luxury and massive building.

Egypt had already passed from the primitive to the heroic age, and and from the heroic to the feudal, three thousand years before Christ. What happened in the time sector of that development can be traced to-day in the space sector of the Nile basin, south of Egypt.

The first phase of wild life, of the natural flora and fauna of a virgin river, of the primitive hunter with arrows and spears, can still be seen on parts of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. There are no traces of this phase left in Egypt. There are no crocodiles lurking behind a papyrus bush on the river bank near Memphis, waiting to devour slaves—there is no Memphis, no slaves, no papyrus. There is no jungle, no beast of prey—in point of fact, Egypt is poorer in wild life than Great Britain. Intense cultivation has destroyed a great deal of the natural fauna of the river and any form of stagnant water must be drained by law. The Nile has ceased to overflow its Egyptian banks and the country now possesses one of the most highly developed systems of irrigation in the whole world.

The second phase is man's struggle for mastery over nature aided by whatever tools he has been able to devise. This phase still survives

SOCIAL EVOLUTION

in the Sudan side by side with the industrialisation introduced by Britain. Unaware yet of time and speed, at this stage of the development of civilisation, man still awaits the chance to force nature to yield up his everyday needs. Unaware of culture or science as his road to salvation and self-fulfilment, he expresses his future desires and standards in myths and magic, in gods and beasts. Though still the hunter, he is also the farmer. Having discovered the perils of relying on living from hand to mouth on the meat of birds and beasts, he harvests, stores crops, and domesticates the least ferocious of the animals.

The division into phases to illustrate the development of history is rarely clear-cut. Even to-day there are men who live from hand to mouth and use tools as members of industrialised communities. It is nevertheless useful to classify; it helps us to understand history.

The landscape of this phase is best described by Shakespeare in "Anthony and Cleopatra", though the picture here given antedates Cleopatra's reign by at least two thousand years:

"The higher Nilus swells,
The more it promises; as it ebbs, the seedsman,
Upon this slime and ooze, scatters his grain
And shortly comes to harvest."

Only the genius of Shakespeare could have divined the rapid quickening of plants in the silt of Egypt under an Egyptian sun—coming so shortly to harvest.

But what is described here was preceded by the rush of the brown living water over the stagnant old stream. One can still see a picture of the virgin river in flood in the Sudan. When the Nile overflowed its banks, it brought down seeds of papyrus, acacia, palms, and of countless rushes from its highlands; Ibis and heron, swifter than the flood, impatiently grazed the rushing flow, speeding on only to return as a child to its slower-paced guardian. The water swarming with fishes and reptiles, was fringed with the heads of buffaloes and crocodiles. Clouds of mosquitoes hovered over the river. From the north, as if in response

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

to a given signal, quail, flamingo, lapwing, and turtleduck—a host of Asiatic and European birds—crossed the Mediterranean to meet the new Nile.

This spate of life with its complement of death to feed it, overwhelmed the peasant for centuries with its waste and cruelty. His reaction was a complexity of fear, abasement, and of self-preservation. He worshipped beasts, birds, and even insects in the hope of appeasing nature. He built his huts on high ground, or floated on rafts of palm-trunks for days waiting for the water to recede. He trapped buffaloes, the least ferocious of the Nile animals, and lived on fish and game. Finally, he dug canals in the "slime and ooze" to drain the water and sowed his seeds in the silt left over by the Nile. At the same time he studied his environment rationally. He had already learnt enough of the nature of flint and of metal to make weapons for hunting. By imperceptible degrees this rationalisation progressed, became more specialised, more fruitful. About the time the Great Pyramids of Giza were built (4000 B.C.) there existed in Egypt a higher level of civilisation than that which existed in most parts of Europe a thousand years after Christ.

Here is an imaginary description of an Egyptian city of the fourteenth century B.C. as given by the eminent Egyptologist Jean Capart:

I shall ask the reader to join me in a rapid tour of this capital, Akhetaten, which rose from the desert at the will of a revolutionary Pharaoh. . . . The city stretched along the river bank for a good six miles, its districts grouped round the main sacred and imperial buildings, and linked by broad avenues and geometrically planned streets. On the principal thoroughfares stood the residences of the great court functionaries and imperial officials, surrounded by gardens, pools, and summer-houses. Most of these dwellings were made to a set plan . . . and comprised not only reception and domestic apartments, but also every additional convenience, such as bathrooms, which could minister to the comfort of the inhabitants. The temple and the main palace stood in the Royal Avenue, which ran parallel to the river. The avenue was spanned by a great brick bridge, joining the two wings of

SOCIAL EVOLUTION

the palace, which lay on opposite sides of the road. The architecture of these palaces . . . show a real sense of design; there are spacious colonnaded courts, opening into magnificent reception halls, but there are also private apartments where life could be lived in comfortable and artistic surroundings. The walls were covered with large decorative designs. . . . The columns which rose from the floor in the form of papyrus sheaves, seemed to spring from an expanse of water, full of flowers and peopled with birds and fishes. Farther out, towards the desert, were the comfortable quarters of the police officials. Great roads branched out from the plain towards various points in the mountain. Here stood the stelae which recorded the foundation of the city, flanked by sculptures. . . . One of the most interesting places to see in the city was, perhaps, the Northern Palace, which contained, among other marvels, a park with strange animals, kept for the pleasure of the spectators.

(THE LEGACY OF EGYPT. P80/1)

Problems which his instrument of production enabled him to solve, the peasant tackled efficiently. Gradually he acquired a wide knowledge of plant life, the medical value of herbs, the breeding of poultry and the treatment of animal diseases. Eventually he even learnt reading and writing, for we have records with calculations of the exact quantity of fodder and its variety suitable for feeding domestic animals, including poultry.

But there were problems beyond the peasant's vision and tools, which he solved with the help of the village artisan who had acquired superior technical knowledge through acquaintance with the crafts, Craftsmanship, not magic as some writers think, is the father of science. Like politics, magic is indolent science and the magician in common with the politician has always belonged to the leisured classes.

Houses made of sun-baked bricks were good enough for the peasant who could replace them when the flood swept them away. Stone had to be used for housing the gods and oracles, the kings and clerks, and to insure the comfort of the leisured class which had to be fed and housed.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

In the first two of the four milleniums which preceded the Christian era, the Egyptians not only built temples, palaces, tombs, and pyramids which outlasted the vandalism of conquerors, which still defy the hand of time, but they were also the first to teach the world such industries as shipbuilding, metal mining, spinning, weaving, the tanning and dyeing of leather, the making of paper and pigments, the manufacture of glass and glaze, of cosmetics and incense, of perfumes, wine, and wax.



*A Humorous Animal Scene from Ancient Egyptian
Mural Paintings.*

6

Legacy of Ancient Egypt

In their contact with the land, in their allotment of fields and the assessment of crops, in the timing of sowing and the propitiation of gods, in the erection of temples, in the building of barges, they gradually discovered the sciences of arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. They could solve such problems as:

- (a) Divide ten measures of barley among ten men so that each may get an eighth more than his neighbour.
- (b) Find the area of a circular field nine cubits in diameter.

It seems certain that the Ancient Egyptians knew the properties of the Isosceles triangle expressed by the formula:

$$A = \frac{bh}{2}; \quad h = \sqrt{\left(2 \frac{Ah}{b}\right)}; \quad b = \frac{b}{h} \sqrt{\left(2Ah\right)}$$

where A=area, b=base, h=height:

and that a triangle the sides of which are proportional to 3; 4; 5; is right-angled.

A. SCIENCE

They knew how to calculate the volume of a pyramid; they had a clear idea of the nature of a geometrical series, and according to the late J. S. Sewell, they used a system of two calendars, one of 365 days, the other of 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days which was the most accurate use of calendars yet practised by man.

They had an inter-related system of measure and weights comparable only to the French metric system. They were acquainted with the difference between star and planet, and they drew maps to show the

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

position of the principal stars and constellations observed from Memphis about 3500 B.C.

They were the first to divide the day into 24 hours, making the night 12 and determining each hour by the use of water-clocks when the stars were not visible. The hours of the day were determined by sundials.

B. MEDICINE

Embalming, originally a religious ritual, helped the ancient Egyptians at a very early stage to familiarise themselves with the organs of the human body, and to discover the anatomical resemblance between man and the other mammals. Linguistic evidence from hieroglyphics, the testimony of ancient Greek and Levantine historians, numerous recipes which were handed down from the ages and are still to be found in use by country folk, and the approval of these recipes by medical men up to this day, attest the fame of ancient Egypt in medicine. Both Homer and Herodotus speak of the unmatched skill of Egypt's physicians and specialists. The latter relates that King Cyrus sent to Egypt for an oculist. It is now a recognised fact that the foundations of medicine were laid in Egypt, not in Greece. It is true that magic, especially in the early dynasties, was mixed up with medicine. But there came a time when medicine was practised independently and magic was resorted to only in difficult cases. The same happens to-day even in parts of Europe.

The Egyptians were the first people to discover the medical value of castor oil, cumin, coriander, dill, garlic, and hartshorn; of purgatives, poultices, and of fasting on certain days of the month.

Up to this day the Egyptian medical practitioner, in common with the Egyptian mathematician, can hold his own among his colleagues anywhere in Europe. "Knowing no better" is not the reason for the Egyptian physicians approval of the country folk's recipes, it is the fact that the medical difference between the home recipes and a doctor's prescription does not justify the prohibitive price charged by the Greek chemist in an Egyptian provincial town. One cannot expect a peasant earning two shillings a day for himself and his family to spend it on

LEGACY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

an aperient, admittedly well presented and labelled, when a halfpenny worth of crude castor oil from the native herbalist would do as well.

And here is a point to remember; backwardness is not always caused by ignorance, it may be due to poverty or even to common sense.

Modern Egypt is in great need of medical services. The well-to-do class is fairly well provided with nursing-homes and specialists, but there are not enough hospitals, clinics, and general practitioners in the provinces to meet the requirements of the poorer people. This is partly due to over-centralisation, partly to lack of doctors and nurses, and partly to the over-emphasis placed on certain non-medical services when budgeting the expenditure of the country. Until the good health of the people is regarded by the authorities as a prime economic factor as well as a social responsibility, Egypt will be unable to contribute fully, either culturally or productively, to civilisation.

C. ART

In architecture, sculpture, relief, mural-painting; in the crafts which make of the articles in daily use objects of beauty, Egypt once reached a summit of culture unsurpassed even by Greece. Down through the ages and periods of Egyptian history, a tradition of building in the grand style has continued to the present. To this day the greatest of all human constructions (an expression in stone of the "Vanity Fair" theme), remains the great Pyramids of Giza. It is indeed a fair to which the pilgrim tourists from Europe and America still travel every winter to bear out the vanity theme of King Cheops.

But there are other ancient monuments on the banks of the Nile which in size and in beauty court the admiration of the world. To appreciate fully the ancient architecture of Egypt, one has to study the local materials and the forms of native plants from which it evolved: how the brick wall and the interwoven reed fence with its inevitable inward slope were the origin of the slanting stone walls of the temples; how the cavetto cornice which stands above the level of a building developed in form from the palm fronds or papyrus tips which waved free above the interwoven wall of primitive structures. Again how the

shape of the reed bundle was copied into the ribbed columns, and the bud of the lotus flower into the lotus capital.

(i) *Architecture*

Champollion, the greatest of Egyptologists, once said, "No people, ancient or modern, have had such sublime and vast conception of the art of building as the Egyptians. Their vision is that of men a hundred feet high."

The Karnak, Deir el-Bahari, Abu Simbel, and the Temple of Isis on the Island of Philae, are masterpieces of architecture unmatched in any other country.

Of the Arab and the Mamulukes periods, the Ibn Tulun mosque and the Sultan Hassan College are two masterpieces which, though different in style, attest the continuity of grand scale building in Egypt. Of the mosque, Professor A. Creswell writes:

When one stands at the entrance of the Great Sahn (courtyard) and observes its vast proportions, its rich yet restrained decoration, the simplicity of its lines, the height and depth of its great vaults and the rich stalactite balconies of the minaret rising over the south corner, one feels bound to admit that this madrasah (college) is one of the great things of the world.

The Giza University colleges built of modern material but with Pharaonic columns and a simplified classical structure make a happy compromise of ancient and modern, and the Fuad I Hospital was at the time of its building one of the largest in the world. On the other hand, the Imobilia Building in Cairo with its central heating and air conditioning, carries the same grand tradition into the domain of the modern architecture. It is interesting in this connection to find that building in Egypt has always been one of the highest paid of all the crafts.

(ii) *Sculpture*

It is difficult to efface from the mind of the European layman the unhappy impression of Egyptian sculpture created by posters and guide-books, for it is always the Sphinx, the statue of King Rameses standing, or the Collosi of Memnon that they photograph and circulate as a

specimen of what the tourist should expect in Egypt. Most of these statues belong to commercial art and are of little value. It is an equally unhappy arrangement forced upon Egypt that a great number of ancient monuments of great artistic merit have been taken out of the country to be isolated in European museums and housed with mummies and coffins. But even among the connoisseurs there is a confusion of art standards. An application of Greek criticism to Egyptian art inevitably checks the flow of appreciation of anything which does not fit in with the pattern of development of Greek art. I feel reluctant to give photographs here of ancient masterpieces because this mode of indirect reception excites our sense of antiquity at the expense of our aesthetic sensibility. Thus objects of art become symbols of a bygone civilisation, of a way of life which, under the stress and hustle of our age, we reconstruct and idealise.

Ancient Egyptian art in general and sculpture in particular cannot be judged by the standards of European art, which implies standards of judgment in direct descent from Aristotle.

The Egyptian artist, unlike the Greek and the later European, had no individuality to express, no style, no idiosyncrasy and no intention of immortalising himself through his art. He did not set himself to 'imitate' in the Aristotelian sense. He had certain traditional forms handed down to him which he accepted in a truly classical spirit, and which forbade him to make images of men and animals in the naturalistic manner. Yet there was no lack of realism, no stiffness of form in his best work. He suppressed his individuality and fused the nature of his subject-matter in the material upon which he worked and in the technique he used. When it was surface and line he made of men and beasts two dimensional beings; when stone, he revealed its nature as if it had been the stuff of which living things are made. As an illustration of the deliberate avoidance of naturalism, one may mention Thutmose, the great sculptor of the XVIIIth Dynasty. Thutmose's method was based on a realistic study of his models. First he made casts taken from real life. Then through a process of modelling and remodelling he gradually imposed the conventional forms of his period on the statue.

At the same time he stressed those features which typified his people. He also used his line and curve to suggest certain human qualities such as dignity, or certain attributes such as royalty. All through he harmonised the nature of his material with the realistic form of his model. The cast statue of Nefretiti shown here is the first stage of the process just explained. The final product is the famous bust, smuggled by a German Egyptologist, which is now in the Berlin Museum.

Better than any ancient artist, the Egyptian sculptor understood the nature of stone—solid, durable, still, unyielding to life, yet of magnitude and power—these were the qualities he revealed in fashioning his statues. Through the use of line and curve, of balance and poise, he compels us to symbolise and associate. Thus in looking at the Diorite statue of King Khaphron on his throne (Egyptian Museum) or at Amenemhet's head in Obsidian, or at Epet, goddess of conception in the form of a hippopotamus (Cairo Museum), we are compelled by the workmanship of the artist to associate the qualities of stone with the power of kings, the veneration of priesthood or the enormity of childbearing.

The ancient Egyptian artist had a wider concept of the unity of life than either the Greek or the Roman artists. Gods, kings, noblemen, and priests he portrayed, but with equal zest he portrayed the humble folk; jesters, children playing, peasants, carpenters, bricklayers, porters, and women going to their fields—not to mention a rich variety of animals, reptiles, and insects, and a combination of men and beasts. Gregarious by tradition, he did not limit his interest to isolated models. Whether men, sphinxes, or rams, he invariably grouped them, making avenues of his statues and processions of his painted figures. He delighted in things of life: in sowing and harvesting, cooking and baking, ship- and temple-building, in the festivals of the new year—in all aspects of city and country life.

(iii) *Mural Painting*

There was nothing too trivial or lowly for this art. It is no exaggeration to say that to visit the temples of Karnak is as good as seeing a

documentary film about the people. It would certainly give one a better idea of ancient Egypt than a visit to the National Gallery would give of European life.

It is a mere acceptance of the ethos which the temple and the tomb emanates to assume that the art of Egypt was ritualistic or stereotyped or that it was preoccupied with the glories of kings and the journey of the soul to the underworld. It would be fairer to assume that art was so vital and so functional that it overflowed life into the tomb. Besides, to assume that an art which was executed and preserved for a certain purpose to be all that could have existed in scope or style, would be on a par with assuming the sculpture in the English cathedrals to be representative of all English sculpture.

The catholic interest of the artist in the various activities and sections of his community was reciprocated by the common folk. There was no tool, garb, dwelling, or domestic animal too humble to be refined by art; by colour or carving, by artistic moulding or ornamentation. A look at the mural paintings of the tombs and temples of Egypt makes it clear that even the slaves had a degree of appreciation of art. Even the kitchen pots and the field tools, even the sickle and the plough, the threshing machine and the axe the *fallabin* shaped gracefully or carved in relief patterns.

(iv) *Crafts*

This tradition of beautifying all the things in daily use among the peasants continues to our own day. In rural districts as well as in the cities, one invariably sees a donkey cart with an underboard carved in lattice pattern of admirable workmanship. Poor carters deck their donkeys with beads and brass ornaments. Peasants interweave their baskets with coloured palm leaves, and the sherbet pedlar of Cairo still remains an object for painters. Moreover, I have seen in the most sordid quarters of Cairo, geranium, sweet basil, and marjoram growing on window-sills in pots. I have seen in the poverty-stricken tenements of the city framed Koranic verses, raffia mats in coloured patterns or prints of the Arab epic heroes such as Al-Hiláli Salama and Antara

hanging on the walls. People of such frugal means as the working people of Egypt who could yet spare a few piastres to beautify their homes could not with justice be called cultureless, unless one restricts the word culture to talking of Kipling's poetry, and Gainsborough's paintings.

It is therefore an unjust calumny—and there are many of these—against the Egyptian people to describe them as cultureless. One often wonders what degree of culture those refined ladies and gentlemen of Europe, who write so condescendingly of the Egyptian people, would retain if they were made to suffer the disease and exploitation the *fallahin* have been subjected to for centuries.

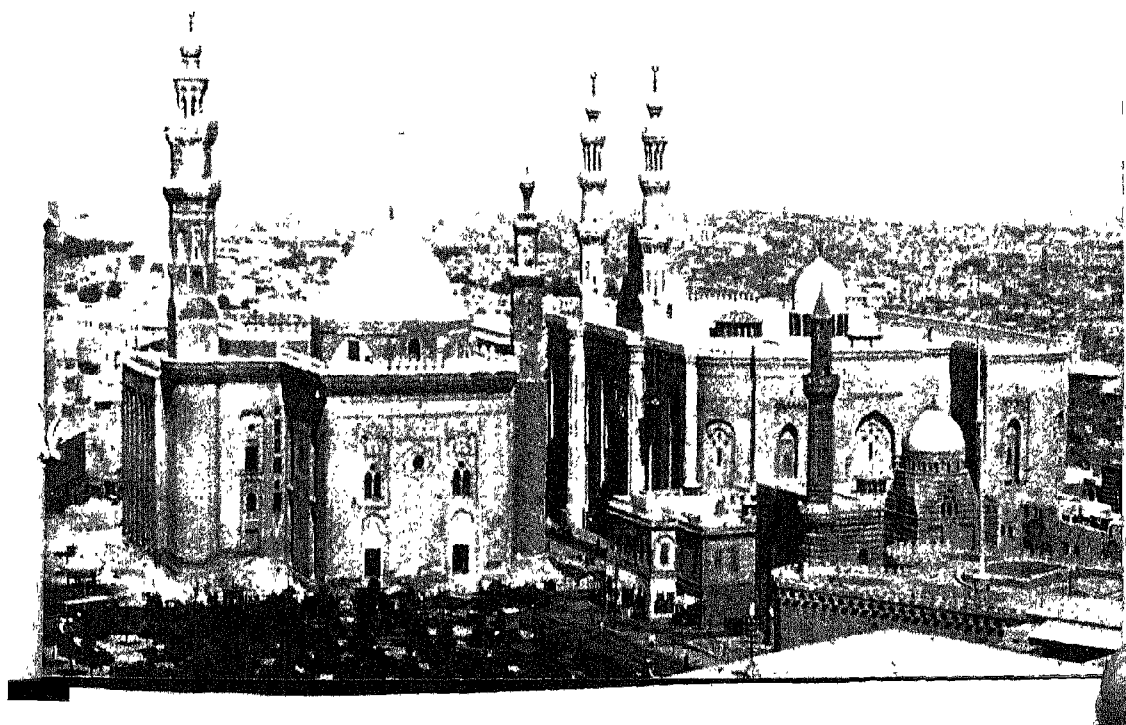
What those critics mean is that they have met someone who has no knowledge of their native table manners nor of Kipling's poetry or Gainsborough's paintings. It is a fact, however, that the Egyptian's knowledge of European culture is considerably more than the European's of Egyptian culture.

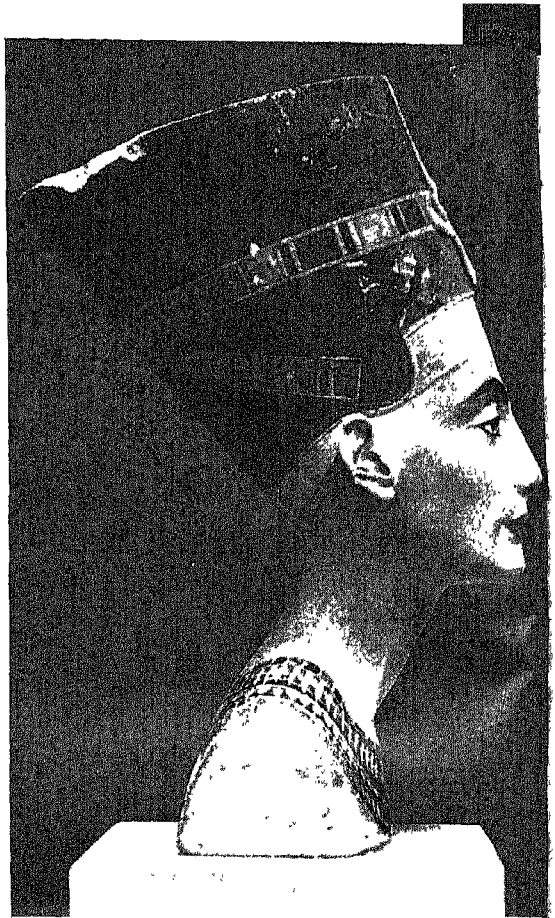
It might be true that the average Egyptian does not know the names of the non-native flowers and trees which make up the majority of the plants in Egypt to-day, particularly in the cities. Nevertheless, every farmer there knows the names of the native plants, trees, and even weeds; and there is no home in Egypt which is without flowers on the feast of *Sham-en-Nessim*, the most ancient of all feasts. Up to this day the *fallahin* children model the Nile clay into images of the Sphinx and the ram, the village gossip and the village headman. Some of the models done by illiterate and untutored peasant children still retain the vitality, mood, and strength of the old Egyptian artist.

It is of interest in this connection to note that whereas the foreign control of Egypt early in this century encouraged higher education, in so far as the training of the government officials, the professional class, and the skilled workman were concerned, yet it ignored cultural education. The two main cultural institutes of modern Egypt—the Egyptian University and the School of Fine Arts—were started as two national enterprises, in opposition to officialdom, to satisfy the native cultural requirements which the then foreign controlled ministry of education ignored.



15 THE MOSQUE OF SULTAN HASSAN





(Above)

HEAD OF NEFERTITI

16. left (from cast) from Tell el Amarnah

17. right (final product)

(Below)

HEAD OF AMENEMHET III IN OBSIDIAN

(in the collection of M. C. S. Gulbenkian)

(v) *Writing*

In writing, modern research work is making it increasingly evident that the Phoenician alphabets are the link between the Greek alphabets and the Egyptian hieroglyphics. But it is the material for writing—the papyrus roll—which had a direct influence on the preservation of culture and learning, not only of Greece but of the whole of the Mediterranean basin. The size and number of sheets in a roll decided the size and chaptering of an author's work. Until the end of the sixth century A.D., Egypt was the sole paper-manufacturing country in the world. The only writing material available for a Greek poet, an Irish monk, or an Alexandrian philosopher was the papyrus roll. From Britain to the borders of Nubia, from Gaul to Mesopotamia, the paper of Egypt was used to convey the literature and learning of the civilised world from generation to generation. It is inconceivable that the civilisation of the Mediterranean basin could have attained the magnitude and the degree of development which it did without the papyrus roll of Egypt.

D. LITERATURE

(i) *Influence on Old Testament*

In literature the Phoenicians must have carried the tales of old Egypt to the islands of Greece, where minstrels and poets would have naturalised their themes and symbolism. In the same manner the Arabian Nights were later naturalised into German or Russian stories and themes. But more important and direct was the influence of the Egyptian writers on the chroniclers of the Old Testament. It might come as a shock to many a lay-reader to know that parts of the Old Testament, are, to use modern phraseology, mere plagiarisms from ancient Egyptian writers. Below, the reader will find a very few examples of many remarkable similarities between some verses of the Proverbs and the writings of Amen-Em-Ope. Traces of the influence of ancient Egyptian writers are further to be found in the Pentateuch, the Song of Solomon, the Book of Job, and in Exodus—traces not only of phraseology but of theme and idiom.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

The following is a quotation from Oesterley's article in *The Legacy of Egypt* entitled "Egypt and Israel". The translation of the Authorised Version was done rather liberally with a certain regard for literary style. The translation here given is the more literal and I have naturally preferred it because it better illustrates the similarity:

Proverbs

Incline thine ear, and hear my words,
And apply thine heart to apprehend;
For it is pleasant if thou keep them in
thy belly,
That they may be fixed like a peg upon thy
lips.

Have I not written for thee thirty sayings
Of councils and knowledge!
That thou mayest make known truth to
him that speaketh,
That thou mayest carry back words to him
that sent thee.

Rob not the poor, for he is poor,
Neither oppress the lowly in the gate.

.
A man who is skilful in his business,
Shall stand before kings.

.
Remove not the widow's land-mark,
And enter not into the fields of the father-
less.

.
Toil not to become rich,
And cease from thy dishonest gain;
For wealth maketh to itself wings,
Like an eagle that flieth heavenwards.

The Teaching of Amen-Em-Ope

Give thine ear, and hear what I say,
And apply thine heart to apprehend;
It is good for thee to place them in thine
heart,
Let them rest in the casket of thy belly;
That they may act as a peg upon my tongue.

Consider these thirty chapters;
They delight, they instruct
Knowledge how to answer him that
speaketh,
And how to carry back a report to one that
sent him.

Beware of robbing the poor,
And of oppressing the afflicted.

.
A scribe who is skilful in his business
Findeth himself worthy to be a courtier.

.
Remove not the land-mark from the
bounds of the fields
. . . and violate not the widows boundary.

.
Toil not after riches;
If stolen goods are brought to thee,
They remain not over the night with thee
They have made for themselves wings like
geese,
And have flown into the heavens.

LEGACY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

But it is not always in a didactic vein that they wrote poetry. The hymn to Aton—almost identical in parts with psalm civ—reveals the groping of the Egyptian mind for a principle of unity in the universe long before the Hebrew prophets began their search for God:

“ When thou settest in the western horizon of Heaven,
The world is in darkness like the dead.
Men sleep in their chambers, their heads are wrapt up,
Every lion cometh forth from his den.
The serpents, they sting.
Darkness reigns, the world is in silence.
He that made them has gone to rest in his horizon.

Thou art he who createst the man-child in woman,
Who givest life to the son in the body of his mother,
Who soothest him that he may not weep,
A nurse even in the womb.”

(ii) *Poetry*

More beautiful than this hymn is the famous poem to death. In its metaphor, in the discipline of its selectivity, in the delicacy of its handling and its cumulative effect, this is surely a poem to rank among the highest in any literature.

“Death is before me to-day
Like the recovery of a sick man;
Like going out into the garden after an illness.
Death is before me to-day
Like the fragrance of myrrh;
Like the sitting under a (ship's) sail on a breezy day.
Death is before me to-day
Like the scent of the lotus flowers;
Like resting on the roadside to drink deep.
Death is before me to-day

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

Like the course of the overflowing water-channel,
Like the return of a man from a ship of war to his house.
Death is before me to-day
Like the clearing of a (mist from) the sky;
Like a man fowling therein towards that of which he was not aware.
Death is before me to-day
As a man craves to see his home
When he has spent years in captivity."

But the ancient poet was not always serious. He wrote songs for men to sing as they drank their wine, for children at play, for the virgins at harvest-time, for the peasants to sing to their oxen as they ploughed their fields. He wrote with a tenderness, a freshness reminiscent of the Elizabethan songsters. *Here is a prose version of a song for a girl who was supposed to sing it as she made a wreath of flowers:*

I am thy first sister, and to me thou art a garden which I have planted with flowers and all sweet-smelling herbs, and I have directed a canal into it, that thou mightest dip thy hand into it when the north wind blows cool. The place is beautiful where we walk, because we walk together, thy hand resting in mine, our mind thoughtful and our heart joyful. It is intoxicating to me to hear thy voice, yet my life depends upon hearing it. Whenever I see thee it is better for me than food and drink.

E. DANCING

In their dances they symbolised the reeds swayed by the wind and the river swelling with the flood and the ibis swooping down to the fields. They made patterns of the slender line of the palm and the curves of the willow, of the outline of the hill and the arch of the sky. Their mural paintings have preserved for us some of the loveliest tableaux.

Dancing is an instinctive activity, but in common with all the arts of Ancient Egypt, it was not isolated from the whole life of the people to be practised in public halls or performed on the stage. It was enjoyed by all the young members of every household, especially the females. Among the peasants it was practised in the fields, in the

open squares of the village, sometimes in sheer buffoonery, sometimes in celebrations of the Harvest Festivals and sometimes as a form of drill. From its ritual function in the symbolism of myths such as the Osiris mystery, dancing developed later into a treatment of certain nervous disorders. Nowadays, myths and mysteries are long forgotten, but the same patterns of dancing you see on the walls of the tombs, are still followed among the peasants, especially in the south of Egypt.

F. CHRISTIANITY

I have previously indicated that the influence of the ancient Egyptian religious thought and literature on the writers of the Old Testament and the Hebrew religion has recently been proved to be more direct than was assumed by the scholars of the nineteenth century. I do not think that the old Hebrew Prophets were justified in hurling so many curses against the Egyptians. Egypt has probably less on her conscience than most other countries in their treatment of the Jews. We are never conscious of the Egyptian Jews as being foreigners or as differing racially from ourselves.

The influence of Egypt on Christian theology is even more than her influence on Judaism. No city has contributed more to the moulding of Christian thought than has Alexandria. The Coptic Church which claims St. Mark for its founder was one of the very first to be established outside Palestine. This is because of the continuous cultural relations between Egypt and Greater Syria and because the Egyptians have always taken kindly to new religions. Early in the history of Christianity, under the stress of Roman persecution, monasticism originated in Egypt. Great numbers of Copts were driven into the desert where they developed the ascetic life which was soon to pervade Christendom. The very word hermit means "a desert man" and the plundered tombs of the Pharaohs provided convenient dwellings for the hermits who found in the desolation of the tomb a further stimulus for rejecting the world. I am not defending monasticism as a desirable mode of life, but we must not forget that throughout the Dark and the Middle Ages the monasteries were the centres of culture in Europe.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

Names like Paul of Thebes, St. Anthony, St. Pakhom of Akhmim, are names intimately connected with a way of life which spread rapidly northward across the Mediterranean to France and farther north as far as Ireland. Tradition represents St. Patrick as a spiritual brother of Lerins, the founder of a monastery in Southern Gaul and of John Cassin, a thinker of the fifth century. These two men were educated among the monks of Egypt. They returned to Europe to teach the practices of the ascetic life of the Egyptian desert. So well known was Egypt in Ireland that from the sixth century onward, whenever an Irish bishop or presbyter desired a spiritual retreat or stimulus, he travelled to Egypt. The books of John Cassin in which he held the Egyptian ascetics as the ideal monks, were read all through the Middle Ages in Benedictine monasteries throughout Western Europe—indeed they are still so read. As late as 1320 Simon Fitzsimon and Hugh—two Franciscans of Dublin—made the journey to Egypt and left us a record of the pilgrimage to the desert monasteries. So marked is the influence of Egypt on Irish monasticism that we find the word “desert” with a variation of spelling in many Irish place-names, such as, Disertmartin, Disert in Westmeath, Killadysert in Clare, etc., etc.



A Humorous Animal Scene from Ancient Egyptian Mural Paintings.

7

Decline and Revival of Ancient Culture

I have often been asked by English friends; how is it that a civilisation which promised so much in early history could not go beyond the feudal stage? What was the cause of its decline? How far is the ancient Egyptian culture an active principle in the life of the people to-day?

The answer to the first two questions is simple enough; neither in the case of Ancient Egypt nor in the case of Europe do we know the exact causes which could have made the change from feudalism to capitalism inevitable. One can describe what happened in Europe; one can speak of the Renaissance, the introduction of gunpowder, the creed of Calvin, the rise of the *bourgeoisie* and what not, but no one can explain why these things happened, when and where they happened.

In the case of Ancient Egypt, we have not enough data even to describe. We only know that twice in our ancient history, once in the XIIth Dynasty and once in the XVIIIth, there was no reason why society should not develop beyond feudalism; but it did not.

There was no *a priori* reason why it should. The same stage of development was reached at various times and places, in China and India for instance, and there again progress was arrested. Why? Well, why not? After all, think of the numerous experiments nature makes before one succeeds. Various reasons, however, have been advanced to explain why a machine age did not develop in the ancient world; all old civilisations which had a potentiality to progress further, sprang in regions of plenty, where rivers and fertile lands made production easy, where nature called for no special inventiveness.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

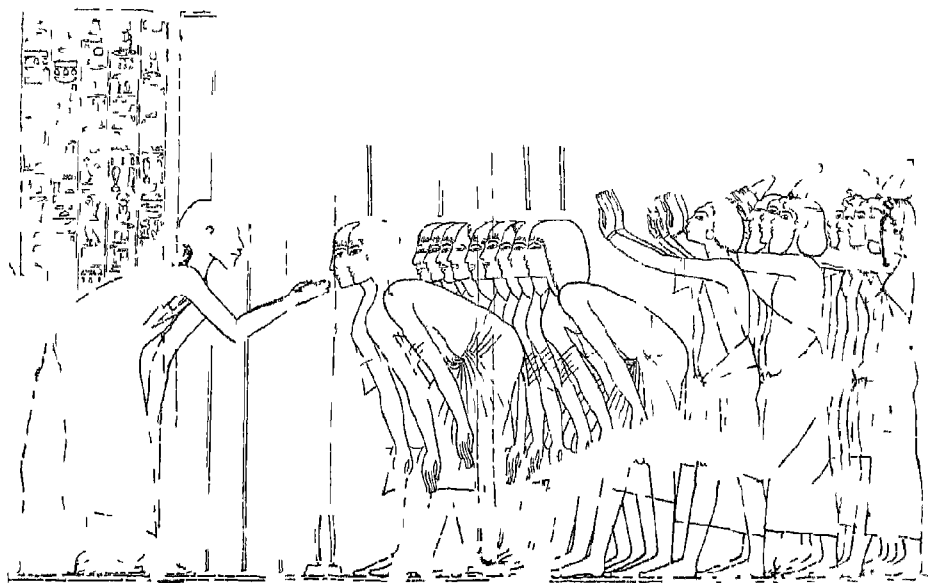
As for the decline of the Ancient Egyptian civilisation, a likely hypothesis is that the two Nile diseases, Bilharziosis and Anchylostomiasis, were chiefly responsible for sapping the energy of the people.

How far is the Pharaonic culture an active principle in the life of Egypt to-day? This is a more interesting question since its answer is verifiable. With the revival of interest in Egyptology, probably under the influence of nationalism too, a keen interest in our history, in the old cultural values and institutions has developed within the last two generations. When Egypt looked to the West, dazzled by its achievements and conscious of her own inferiority, she inevitably concentrated on Western scientific and industrial methods. Eventually she was forced to consider the cultural values of Europe; but whereas no resistance was encountered in the case of scientific and industrial importations from the West, Western cultural values were opposed from the beginning with a violence which decreased only within the last two generations.

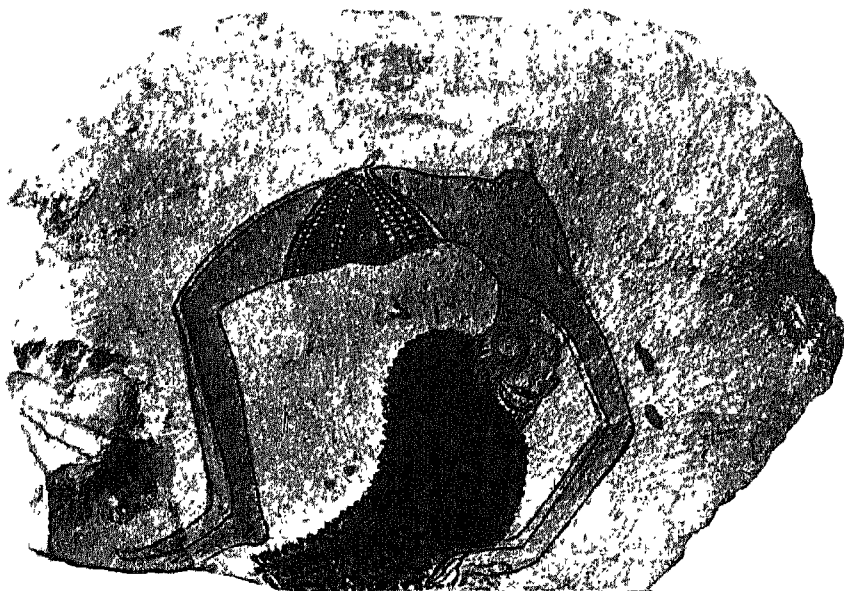
At first it was thought possible to adapt Eastern culture to a background of machinery and empirical habits and outlook—this being the background of life in Europe since her industrial revolution. The idea was entertained because of a natural fear of being submerged, of losing the national character. Gradually our modern thinkers are discovering for themselves the truth that cultural values spring from a people's way of living and working. Consequently, one can no more transplant Eastern spirituality into Western society than one can retain Eastern culture and yet accept the Western ways of life. Subconsciously, whatever is vital in an old culture will in time fuse into the new life and thus will a people insure the continuity of personality.

Under the waning influence of nationalism, the modern Egyptian is proud of his country's ancient achievement. He is aware of a continuity in his history, of the virility of his people and their duty to contribute to human knowledge and progress, of the inexorable laws of survival and the ruthless competition of the West.

Because of the one-sided development of the West in industry and

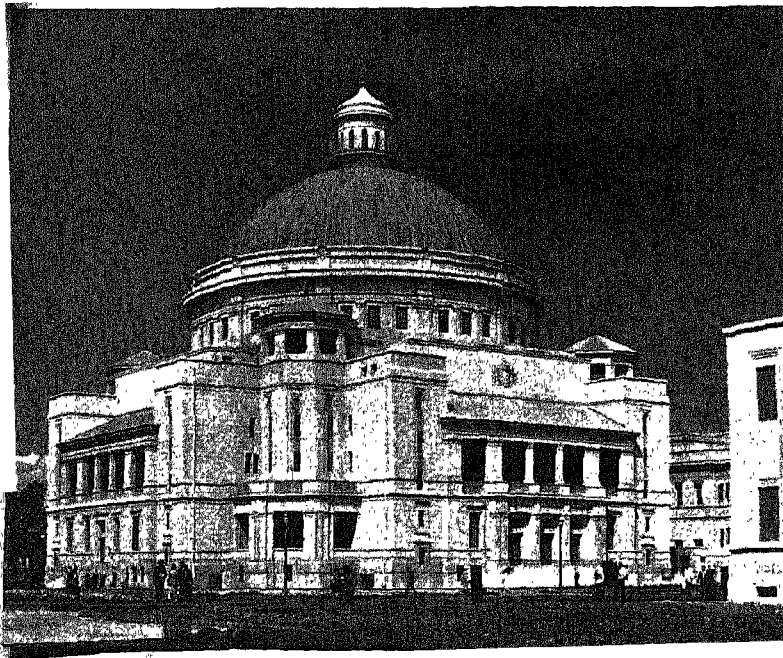
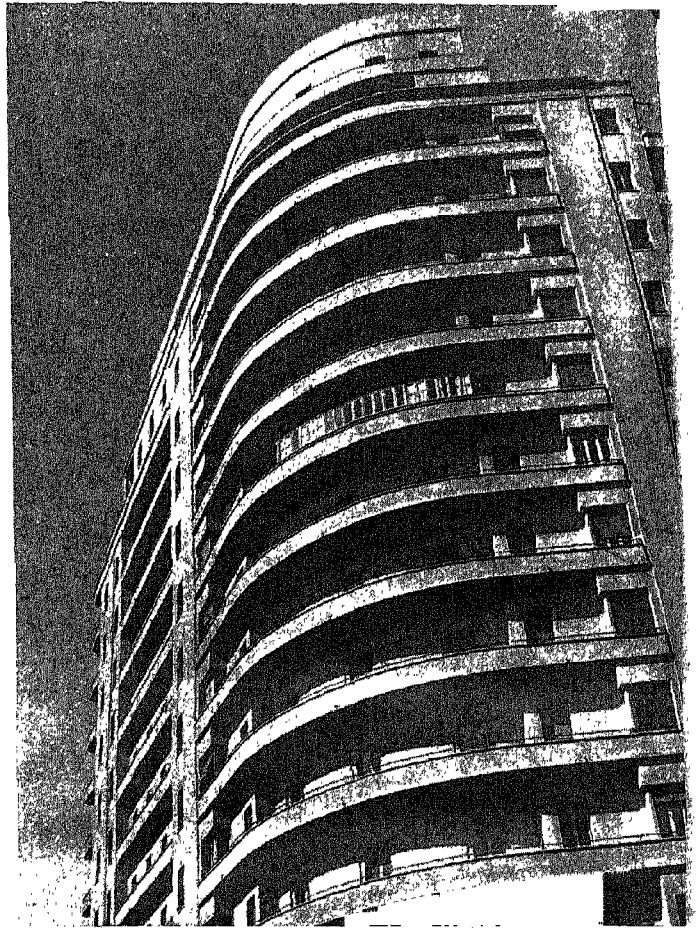


19 THE ACCLAMATION OF RAMOSE
from his tomb at Sheikh 'Abd el Gurnah



20 A GIRL
ACROBATIC
DANCER
(sketch on
Ostiacan in
Tum)

21. MODERN CAIRO:
THE IMMOBILIA
BUILDING



22. THE MAIN
UNIVERSITY
BUILDING

science, and the consequent social and moral unbalance; because the West, too, still clings to values and ideals which belong to a past phase of its development and is frustrated in adapting them to the quick tempo of its contemporary life, the modern Egyptian in common with the rest of the Eastern peoples, sees in the contradictions, hesitance and struggle of the Westerners, cause for suspicion and mistrust. Yet the problem of the East and West to-day is in essence the same—namely, the obstinate refusal of humanity to allow a machine age to develop its own culture and ideals.

I believe that whatever intolerant thoughts East and West might entertain for each other, they are simply a result of a mutual viewing of one another through the insidious influence of anachronistic cultures.

8

Modern Experiments

A. SCULPTURE

Of the experiments carried out in the field of art by the modern Egyptians to graft a new growth on a Pharaonic stem, the first was that begun by the late sculptor M. Mukhtar. Most of his statues are Pharaonic in their form. The Nahdit Massr in the Station Square, Cairo, and "Saad Zaghloul" on the Giza side of Kassr-el-Nil Bridge, both reflect the nationalistic emotions of his age. The first is a good statue on a bad base, the second is a bad statue on a good base, but neither has that organic form of material, form and subject-matter, which characterised the work of the Ancients. Yet there are those of Muktar's countrymen who think that he succeeded in revitalising the old forms. A critical estimate of modern Egyptian art in general will have to be settled by a later generation than mine. My generation is

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

(rightly) more concerned with the basic realities of life than with its cultural problems. We are too much under the harrow of economics, too harassed by the disintegration of our public life to develop that leisured sensibility which is indispensable to an aesthetic judgment.

B. POTTERY

A more successful experiment was that inaugurated by Mme Huda Shaarawy—a great woman and a genuine lover of art. At her own expense Mme Huda Shaarawy had several young Egyptian artists trained in France. Under her guidance, the Huda Works produced pottery, china, tiles, and mosaic tableaux of excellent quality. Unfortunately the difficulties of importing some of the necessary materials from abroad compelled Mme Shaarawy to close the Huda Works during the war. It would be very regrettable if through lack of appreciation of her efforts she were to discontinue an experiment to which she has already given so much of her energy and money. The Huda Works have already gone a long way towards reviving both the Pharaonic and the Arabic arts. In addition, a modern style was evolved, a style which took into account the requirements of our homes, and which made use of the trees, flowers, and materials introduced lately into the country.

C. ARCHITECTURE

In architecture Zaghloul's Mausoleum is probably the best example of the revived Pharaonic style of building. At first the masons used blocks of imitation stone covered with a layer of mosaic to make it resemble granite. Before long the surface cracked and blistered, the heat exposed the fake, and genuine stone had to be used in rebuilding the Mausoleum.

Besides public monuments, occasionally you find a private house, built in imitation of the temple architecture of ancient Egypt. In most of these instances stone is not used, and the outside plaster is squared and coloured to give the impression of a stone building. Columns and cornices are not only ugly in proportions but definitely ridiculous, for they appear like bogus erections built for the scenery of an American

MODERN EXPERIMENTS

film. Whereas there are still builders and craftsmen who have received the traditions of Arabic architecture, handed down to them, no traditions of the ancient Egyptian architecture in stone building exists to-day in Egypt.

All modern building therefore in the Pharaonic style are either slavish imitations of ancient monuments or attempts by revivalists of the modern school to adapt the ancient technique to modern materials. On the other hand, houses of unbaked bricks which belong to the peasantry are architecturally in direct descent from the Pharaonic tradition, and because the tradition still lives, modern experiments carried out chiefly by the state in the building of model villages are successful. Economically, such model villages are no doubt the best to be had in the present circumstances. The houses are cool and the material is cheap. A three-roomed dwelling for a peasant cost something around £35 before the war, but no sane person would prefer them to concrete buildings, if the latter became a practical proposition.

D. SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Within the last quarter century, the State educational authorities have taken a great deal of interest in Ancient Egyptian culture. The industrial, and art schools, particularly in the boom years between the wars, produced a variety of Pharaonic furniture, which became the fashion among the rich owing to its unusualness and handsome finish. Trinket sets, necklaces, bracelets, rings, vases, and chests and numerous other articles in the Pharaonic style were produced by these art schools because they found a ready market. Mural paintings were copied for patterns for woven materials, tent fabrics, and brass work. The ancient crafts, sports, dancing, and drill, were encouraged in the various school societies. Badges and coats of arms were made in the direct reference to the ancient gods and myths. The art schools in general try to discover the principles underlying the ancient sculpture and painting. Place-names and Arabic words in the various dialects were traced back to hieroglyphics, and among the educated Copts in particular names such as Isis, Sezostris, Ramsis, and Amon, became fashionable.

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

School excursions to the various temples and monuments, to the museums, and the ancient sites of the tombs, have grown to the extent that the Ministry of Education found it desirable to create an independent department for their organisation, and the mid-term holiday of schools and colleges alike is invariably devoted to such excursions.

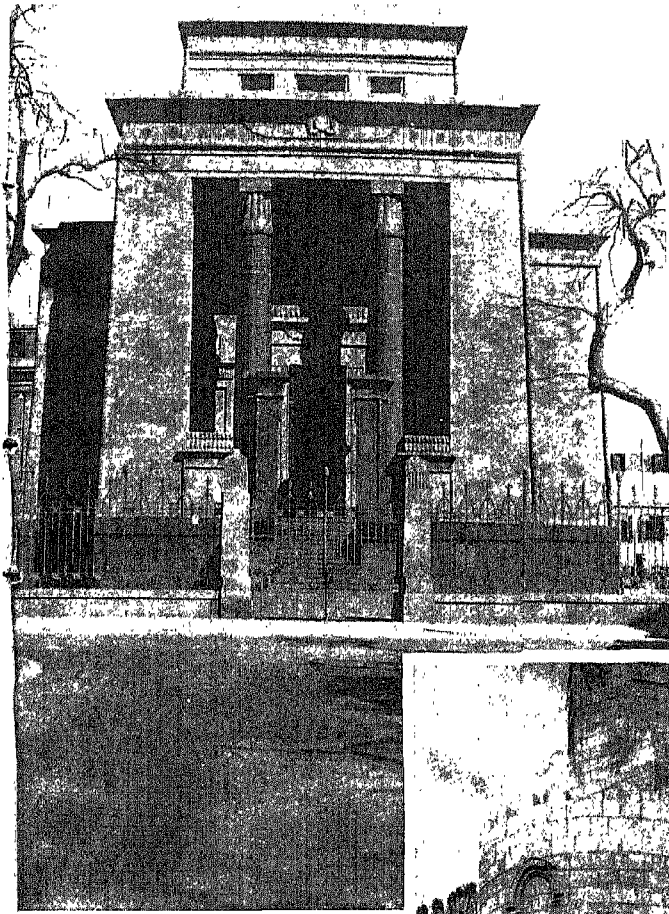
The modern generation under this educational stimula is much more interested in our history than any preceding generation.

There is no doubt that this increasing interest in the Pharaonic culture has stimulated the national movement by giving the people a sense of unity.

E. FURNITURE

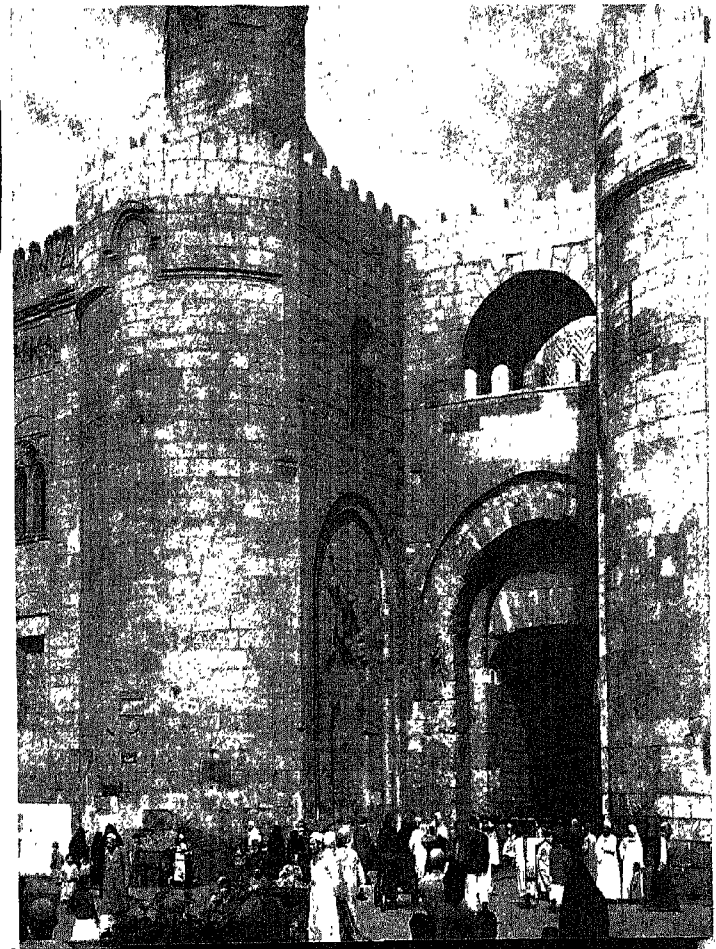
Last but not least, there are the various styles of furniture copied from the Cairo Museum by our art school designers and the bazaar cabinet makers. The modern Egyptian carpet with a simple motif of a lotus is the best example of successful copying from Pharaonic designs, especially when the natural colours of the wool are kept and a variety of shades is gained by blending. You can get as many as twelve distinct colours shading from cream to a deep rich brown, and from off-white to grey to black by blending the wool of white, brown, and black sheep. Not even the sun of Egypt can fade the colours of an Egyptian carpet of undyed wool.

The copying of Pharaonic furniture, on the other hand, resulted in the introduction of one more fashion to the already inharmonious house of the well-to-do. Few signs reflect the conflict in our lives between the old and new, Arabic and Pharaonic Western and Eastern, more than this disturbing tendency; to furnish one room in the Arabesque style, another of Louis XVI's, a third in the Pharaonic's and yet a few steel chairs and glass tables scattered over the halls and balconies of the house. It is a conflict which comprehends our life to-day. It explains the diversity of thought, language, taste, and education characteristic of modern Egypt. A century ago a traveller would not have seen in the streets of Cairo the incongruity of dress and architecture, of manners and crowds which one sees to-day in our cities. You have only to



23. ZAGHLOULS
MAUSOLEUM

24. BAB ZUWEILA,
ONE OF THE OLD
GATES OF CAIRO





25. TABLEAU VIVANT

26. DANCING IN THE OPEN AIR



EVALUATION

go through the old quarters of Cairo to be aware of the harmonious character of its streets. I have mentioned this because some Europeans think that the lack of harmony in the European quarters of Cairo and in some of the homes of the well-to-do indicates an inherent bad taste.

The indiscriminate copying from the Cairo Museum has not been restricted to the Egyptians. Many European and American firms, particularly in the jewellery trade and during the vogue of Tut-Ankh Amun sent their representatives to the Museum to copy its various designs of furniture and jewellery. Some of the products were shipped to the Egyptian bazaars to satisfy the curiosity of the unsuspecting natives and tourists alike. But it would be interesting to trace the influence of patterns and designs copied from the contents of the Cairo Museum in the various fashions of dress and ornament in the West during the last half-century, and to estimate the profit made by the Western traders through the exploitation of ancient culture.

9

Evaluation

These are the main interests and activities revived with the discovery of our ancient history. Will they ever develop into the new culture and civilisation in which modern Egypt shall find her genius? Is it thus that she shall pour her virility into the stream of human progress? Will the Egyptian cities of the future be modern versions of Akhetaten and Memphis with pyramidal sky-scrapers and temple-shaped cinemas and papyrus colonnades for car parks, and sphinx and colossi for public monuments? And what will be the place for

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

reinforced concrete, aluminium, stainless steel, and plastics in our future civilisation? The architecture of temples and pyramids, the sculpture of sphinxes and colossi, imply the use of stone and brick, but from the modern materials the product is the modern block of flats and the prefabricated house.

Again, can a great art or literature grow in the nurseries of schools and college societies? Can a classical language whose speech habits are dead and whose derivatives and meanings are conferred upon it by academies and dictionaries, produce a golden age of literature simply because a number of writers derive their inspiration from ancient history? Will the Pharaonic furniture of our art schools develop with time into a national style in the same manner in which the "Empire" is French or the "Chippendale" English? Will the Egyptian carpet compete in the future with the Persian and Chinese and the Huda Works produce masterpieces equal to Sèvres, Meissen's, or Royal Doulton? Will the myths and tales of Ancient Egypt create a renaissance in literature, the Pharaonic tableaux develop into an Egyptian ballet and our games become olympic?

But there is no end to these daydreams. These symptoms of an inferiority complex are not peculiar to Egypt either. We share them with other small nations and minorities the world over; what is the Zionist Movement, the Gaelic Revival, Kurdish Nationalism, and a dozen more manifestations but the same fear Egypt feels of being submerged by a larger culture? It is a fear which drives a people to cling to past values and ideals in the hope of preserving the community-norm. But may not this community-norm be one which nature in its searching for the fit has long discarded as unfit?

We are beginning to learn that our trials and problems are neither local nor peculiar. They are the problems of many other similar countries, and if we think that the revival of Hebrew and Irish art and literary traditions is doomed to remain a mere cultural curiosity by virtue of its retrograde and isolated character, a Pharaonic or Saracenic revival is sure to meet the same fate.

Neither will industrial Europe ever be able to impose its culture

EVALUATION

upon Egypt. This too will remain isolated and class-limited, a pursuit for the virtuoso at the most.

Will the culture of industrialised Egypt be European and nationally featureless? Before discussing this it would be better to give a résumé of the various tendencies of the schools of thought in Egypt to-day. The state-controlled educational institutions encourage a welding of Western education with Islamic principles and Arabic and Pharaonic culture. In trades such as carpet making, building, textile and furniture, production for profit is law, irrespective of taste, principles, or national interest. Religious bodies and conservative intellectuals have almost ceased to resist European ideas. When the Egyptian woman shifted the ground of the controversy about unveiling and hat wearing from religion and principle, on which the modernists some years before had fought and lost, to fashion and matrimonial wisdom, the conservative men-folk gave in, consoling themselves with the smart appearance of their daughters' modern apparel. When the army and the Cairo police force discarded the fez for the hat, the trials of war and shortage of newspaper space for airing opinions helped the change to pass unnoticed. Six years of war were enough to make conservative opinion in Egypt shock-proof. The appearance of women lorry-drivers, police-women, and women uniformed in sergeant's and lieutenants clothes in the streets of our cities, made the most daring of Egyptian adventures look mild in comparison.

Among the Westernised intelligentsia there is a school, growing in influence and number, which supports whole-heartedly the spread of European culture. In Cairo the Egyptian Philharmonic Society has lately translated into Arabic, a collection of songs by various European composers such as Schubert and Schumann. The Arabic words are sung to the composer's music in the same manner the English or Russian translations are. The Society, which is purely Egyptian, is now working on the translation of a whole opera. There are also Egyptian composers who use European forms. Yuosef Grace has, among other compositions a symphony and an opera to his credit, and Abu-Bakr Khairat, an accomplished pianist, has composed two sonatas. Mr. and

Mrs. Rashid and Dr. A. Mosharrafa, the mathematician, are the leading spirits of that movement, but the American College for girls and similar European educational institutes have done a great deal in familiarising the young people with Western musical theories.

10

European Influence

In literature there are Egyptians who write verse, short stories, and novels chiefly in French and English, but their works have not yet gone beyond the stage of being considered as literary curiosities. On the other hand, paintings by Egyptian artists are in some cases first class according to European standard. A. Nur is a first-class etcher and engraver, A. Sabri and M. Saiid are good portrait painters in the classical style. They are gifted, painstaking, and with a wonderful eye for harmony in colours. But we have cubists, impressionists, surrealists, yearly spring exhibitions and various art societies and salons. The most advanced branch of art, however, is cartoon drawing. Political controversy and a large newspaper demand are responsible for its high standard.

The influence of Western culture on science and on the language of the people, will be dealt with in a subsequent booklet devoted to the legacy of the Arabs. But how wide purely European arts may spread to make them a cultural influence is difficult to foretell. The cinema has made itself a strong factor in moulding the taste of the people. A good film in London is often a good film in Cairo. Already the Cairo opera season, which was originally started for the benefit of the European community and the tourists, is mainly an Egyptian affair.

REFLECTIONS

The Government subsidises the European companies which come every year from Europe and the majority of the audience is Egyptian. So is the majority of the listeners to the European broadcasting service of Cairo.

11

Reflections

If all these activities of the top twigs and grafted branches on the social stem are not likely to influence the native tree, what will? If the process of industrialisation already under way is going to conclude in an epoch of unified means of production in which Egypt will be a component part, then the problem of the future of culture in any country will be one and the same. For my part I do not set any value on the differential of art; nor do I believe in the virtuous desirability of a variety of cultures. A universal culture will be just as individual as the numbers of artists or poets in the one country are individual, as long as art and poetry communicate human experience and justify man's natural love of truth. It is not monotony which we have to guard against, it is the clogging of the stream of creative art by the dead growth of past beliefs and tastes.

What will happen, what is actually happening—perhaps slowly and hesitantly—is that the means of production are changing from manual and tool aided to mechanical and mass. Inevitably this process will extend to agriculture. We accept it, and must encourage it. Whatever helps production is good, whatever hinders it is bad. If we accept this statement as valid we must train the young Egyptians in every branch of technology and make full use of the agricultural, mineral, and power sources of Egypt, be they in the desert or the valley. But we must

avoid making the same mistake Europe made and the same experiments which, in Europe, proved failures. We know that production can be so organised in a nation as to satisfy the needs of every citizen, that poverty and disease are not inevitable, that the luxury of to-day is the necessity of to-morrow and that society can so organise itself as to supply public services, vocational training; and education to all. Organisation, science, and industrialisation are what Egypt needs most to-day. When every *fallah* is decently fed and housed and his health is looked after and his education is a part of his social system he will not wait for politicians and schoolmasters to preach culture to him. Culture is as natural a pursuit of man as work or play.

As the people become educated their language will grow to comprehend their requirements. As production gives them security, new social relations will govern their feelings and make greed, fear, and selfishness pointless. As the application of science to life becomes general it will afford every man the leisure and health to find the higher values of life.

Thus a new civilisation will arise in Egypt as everywhere with new modes of thinking and readjusted stresses on human values and emotions. A civilisation full of its own problems. In the solving of these problems the people will find their own literature, art, and culture.

The springs of an industrial culture need not remain thwarted instincts and perverted desires, neither should the culture itself be pathological symptoms of inferiority, want, and insecurity, or escapist flights into the imagined glories of Pharaohs and Arabs, or childish wonder at present-day Europe and America, or contentment with primitive *shadoufs*, *sakias*, donkeys, and camels. How will this culture be Egyptian? Everywhere the culture of this new civilisation will take the colour of its locality. It will be Egyptian in Egypt, because the Nile, the cloudless skies, the desert, the history of the people and its ways of thinking, as manifested in the idiom of our language, are Egyptian. When I look on the history of Ancient Egypt, I sincerely wish that our future culture will not appear mainly in novels and poems, in paintings to be kept in museums and statues to be erected in public

COMMUNICATIONS

galleries, and symphonies to be performed in concert halls. Rather I would have it to excel most in handicraft and architecture, in singing, dancing and story-telling in our homes. I think that the ancient culture of Egypt was more intimately connected with the work of the people and their homes, with the things they did and used, in everyday life, than the culture of Europe to-day is connected with the daily life of Europeans. In hieroglyphics, the word good meant useful as well as beautiful. Among the peasants of to-day, most of their creative energies are usefully applied. To this ancient tradition of unity I should wish my people to revert, not only in handicrafts but in machine production.

12

Communications

In 1940-1 there were 3,686 miles of rails belonging to and worked by the State, including 2,619 miles of main line, 158 miles of branch line, and 909 miles of sidings. There were also 862 miles of agricultural light railways owned by private companies. The State railways have a gauge of 4 ft. 8½ in. inside rails (the line 124 miles in length, from Luxor to Aswan being opened on wide gauge in December 1926) except that to the Western Oases, which is 2 ft. 5½ in.

The number of passengers carried in 1943-4 by the State railways was 58,165,254; weight of goods carried, excluding service transports, 8,486,958 tons. Net receipts in 1943-4 were £E11,255,962, working expenses, £E6,013,350.

The telephones have belonged to the State since April 1918. In 1940-1, the State telegraphs had a length of 11,788 miles of wire, and telephones, 444,972 miles. The Eastern Telegraph Company, by

CULTURAL SURVEY OF MODERN EGYPT

concessions, have telegraph lines across Egypt from Alexandria via Cairo to Suez, and from Port Said to Suez, connecting their cables to England, India, and Port Sudan. The number of telegrams forwarded and received in 1940-1 was: Local, 1,583,500; Commercial, and service, 3,635,759; Foreign, 533,180. The number of telegrams forwarded and received by the State wireless stations in 1941 was 177,735 and by Marconi Radio Telegraph Co., 526,353.

There were in 1941, 5,605 post offices and stations. In the inland service (1941) there passed through the post office 132,639,000 ordinary and registered articles of correspondence, 3,368,000 ordinary and registered articles of correspondence, and, 8,600,000 were dispatched and received to and from abroad respectively. In 1941 receipts were £E774,674; expenses, £E738,280.

Air transport activities are increasing rapidly after being curtailed by war conditions. The Misr Airways (S.A.E.) a purely Egyptian Company, operates various services between Egypt and the chief countries of the Middle East, including Palestine, Syria, Cyprus, Iraq, and Saudi-Arabia. In addition there are internal lines between the chief cities of Egypt, e.g., Alexandria, Port Said, Suez, Ismailia, Ras-el-Bar, Asyut, Luxor, and Aswan.

C. DISTRIBUTION OF LAND

THE FOLLOWING TABLE SHOWS, ON DECEMBER 31, 1941, THE NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND AMONG FOREIGNERS AND EGYPTIANS:

Extent of holding in feddans	FOREIGNERS		EGYPTIANS		TOTAL OF AREA		TOTAL OF LANDOWNERS	
	area in feddans	land-owners	area in feddans	land-owners	feddans	per-centage	land-owners	per-centage
Up to 1	910	1,814	730,340	1,773,340	731,250	12-5	1,775,496	70-8
From 1-5	2,970	1,134	1,176,130	571,596	1,179,100	20-2	572,730	22-8
From 5-10	4,452	640	569,654	85,000	574,106	9-8	85,640	3-4
From 10-20	6,881	472	550,543	40,904	557,424	9-5	41,376	1-6
From 20-30	5,676	227	281,680	11,530	287,356	4-9	11,757	0-5
From 30-50	11,519	287	345,053	8,982	356,572	6-2	9,269	0-4
Over 50	381,690	811	1,776,689	11,207	2,158,379	36-9	12,018	0-5
Total ..	414,098	5,385	5,430,089	2,502,901	5,844,187	100-0	2,508,286	100-0

D. PRODUCTION OF COTTON

THE AREA AND PRODUCTION OF COTTON FOR SIX YEARS WERE:

Year	Area Feddans (acres)	Crop Quintars
1937	1,978,151	11,008,862
1938	1,783,911	8,339,517
1939	1,624,817	8,692,097
1940	1,684,869	9,169,634
1941	1,643,629	8,373,610
1942	712,810	3,569,408

E. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS FOR SIX YEARS:

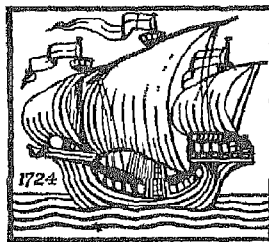
Year	Imports	Exports ¹
1935	32,238,859	35,693,162
1936	31,532,947	32,978,400
1937	38,038,098	39,753,218
1938	36,954,373	29,342,485
1939	34,090,923	34,080,706
1940	31,377,815	27,811,431

F. REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR SIX YEARS (ending April 30)

Years	Revenue	Expenditure EE
1939-40	39,408,329	41,174,155
1940-41	43,677,489	42,558,884
1941-42	56,335,639	46,062,380
1942-43	67,141,000	56,553,000
1943-44	77,190,000	68,940,000
1944-45	72,690,000	76,689,000

¹ Exports of products and manufactures of Egypt.



LONGMANS
OF PATERNOSTER ROW

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THE EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE, LONDON

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE NET.

