IV

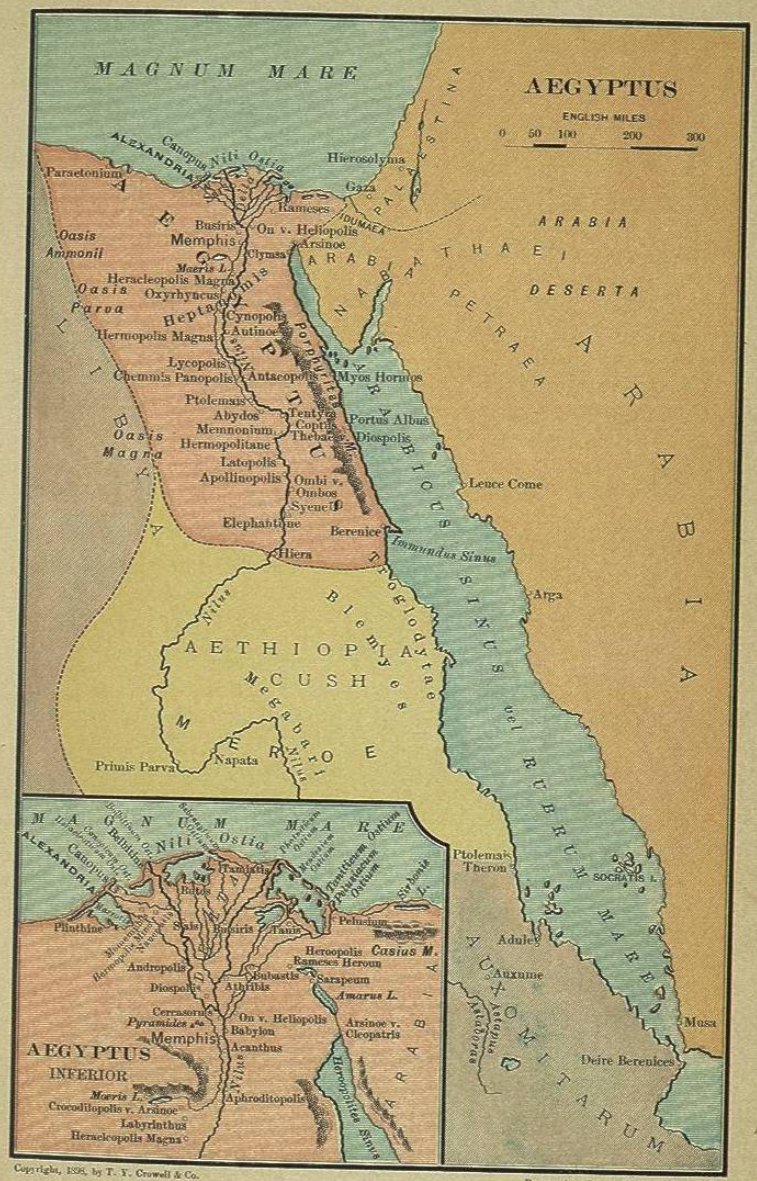
EGYPT

First Inhabitants. — Herodotus said of a part of Egypt, "It is a gift of the Nile." The same might be said of the whole country, for without the periodical inundations of that river the desert would cover everything which was not hidden under the water.

This country is certainly not the one where the first civilized society was formed. Nevertheless, its history, explicit as to a very great number of facts and persons, covers seventy centuries. Before the Persians conquered it (527 B.C.), it had already been ruled by twenty-six dynasties. The names and acts of many of its sovereigns are carved on the monuments with which they covered Egypt. To the fourth king of the first dynasty we may attribute the step pyramid of Saccara, whose worn and crumbling stones seem to support with difficulty the weight of the centuries accumulated upon its head.

The first inhabitants of Egypt did not come from the south, descending the Nile, as was long supposed, but from the north, via the Isthmus of Suez. They belong to the race personified in Genesis under the name of Ham, and called by the Arabs "the Red" from the color of their complexion. This race appears to have formed, under the name of Cushites, the basis of the population all along the shore of the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. These Cushites founded small states, which doubtless existed for long centuries before a powerful chief, Menes, subdued the whole valley from the sea to the cataracts of Syene, and founded, at least five thousand years before our era, the first royal race. To account for this unknown period and for the revolution in which it ended, it was said that at first the gods had reigned, then the demi-gods, that is, the priests, their representatives, and that the latter had been forced to yield their power to a warrior chieftain.

First Dynasties (5000 years B.C.). — Little is known of the first three dynasties, whose sway, eight centuries in



duration, reached the peninsula of Sinai, where on a rock the name of one of their princes has been found, who worked the copper mines in the peninsula. Under the fourth we behold all the marvels of a civilization then unparalleled. Art then reached such development as the most brilliant periods will hardly surpass. What space of time must have elapsed between the day when the first man was cast naked upon the earth with the instincts of a wild animal, and that day six thousand years ago, which saw the admirable statue of Chephren come forth from the hands of an Egyptian Phidias, the pyramids of Gizeh rise, and a great monarchical society formed with a strong political and religious organization? The paintings or the inscriptions of temples and tombs recall to us its industry, its commerce, its agriculture, and all the bloom of its vigorous youth. So early did Egypt enjoy all the art and science which it ever possessed, and subsequent centuries found themselves able to teach it little.

The most celebrated members of the sixth dynasty are a conqueror, Apapu, and a queen, Nitocris. Manetho calls the latter "the rosy-cheeked Beauty," and says that in order to avenge her brother, she invited the persons guilty of his murder to a banquet in a subterranean chamber, into which the waters of the Nile were suddenly admitted.

From the sixth to the eleventh dynasty, monuments are rare, and consequently history is silent. Great calamities must have befallen the country during this period. When the light reappears, we find royalty banished to the Thebaid, whence it emerged in triumph with the kings of the twelfth dynasty, who restored to Egypt its natural boundaries, and began the great struggle against the Ethiopians. One of the family constructed an artificial reservoir, covering sixty-three square miles, and called Lake Mœris, to regulate the overflow on the left bank of the Nile.

Invasion of the Hyksos or Shepherds (2200 B.C.). — A horde of shepherds, without doubt crowded westward by some great movement of humanity in Assyria, penetrated into the valley of the Nile by the Isthmus of Suez and subjugated the Delta and Middle Egypt. Their kings, who formed the seventeenth or Hyksos dynasty, established themselves at Memphis, and fortified the town of Avaris or Plusium at the entrance of the Delta in order to prevent other nomads from following in their footsteps. Appar-

ently it was one of these kings whom Joseph served as minister. After having reigned for five hundred years, the Hyksos were at last defeated by the kings of Thebes, and gradually forced back to the very walls of Pelusium. Ahmes I. succeeded in driving them thence, and the greater part of the nation quitted Egypt. Nevertheless to this day, in the vicinity of Lake Menzaleh, men of robust limbs and angular features are to be found, who may be descendants of the Shepherds.

Prosperity of Egypt from the Eighteenth to the Thirteenth Century. — The expulsion of the Hyksos was followed by prosperity that lasted for more than five hundred years. Thanks to the protecting deserts and its strong political organization, Egypt again developed a brilliant civilization which the greatest men of Greece came to study. This epoch begins with the princes of the eighteenth dynasty (1703–1462): Ahmes the Liberator; Thothmes I., who commemorated his victories by columns on the banks of the Euphrates and Nile; the regent Hatasu, whose exploits the temple of Deir-el-Bahari at Thebes hands down; Thothmes III., the conqueror of western Asia and of the Soudan, "who set the frontiers of Egypt wherever he pleased," as says the author of a heroic song carved on a pillar in the Museum of Boulaq; Amenophis III., the Memnon of the Greeks, the King of the Speaking Statue, which at sunrise saluted Aurora, his divine mother. In the tomb of the mother of Ahmes a veritable treasure of precious stones of the rarest workmanship has been found.

This good fortune continued under the princes of the nineteenth dynasty (1462–1288), several of whom rendered the name Rameses glorious. Seti I., after having carried his arms as far as Armenia, built the pillared hall of Karnak, a masterpiece of Egyptian architecture. He even opened from the Nile to the Red Sea a canal, vestiges of which can still be discerned, and on the arid road to the gold mines of Gebel Atoky he dug a well, which must be called artesian, since the water spouted from it. His successor, Rameses II., is the Sesostris to whom the Greeks have ascribed all the conquests of those ancient kings. He was indeed a warlike prince. Columns found near Beïrout, and a whole poem carved on a wall of Karnak, still attest his achievements. He was above all a great builder. He erected the two temples of Ipsamboul, the Ramesseum of Thebes, and the

obelisks of Luxor, one of which, a granite monolith seventy-seven feet high, covered with inscriptions in his honor, is the central monument of the Place de la Concorde in Paris. He compelled his captives to work on these monuments. The Israelites, scattered in great numbers over Lower Egypt, were treated as slaves. They were forced to labor in the quarries, to make bricks, and construct embankments to protect the cities from inundation. The oppression of their taskmasters fired the slaves with resolution. Under Meneptah the Hebrews departed from Egypt. The tomb of this Pharaoh is still to be seen in the valley of Bab-el-Moluk.

Decline of Egypt. Invasion of the Ethiopians. — The twentieth dynasty (1288–1110) begins with a great king, Rameses III., who represented on the magnificent temple of Medinet Abu at Thebes his exploits in Syria and the Soudan. After him came the decline. Egypt had become enfeebled in attempting to expand. Instead of remaining upon the banks of her sacred river, wherein was her strength, and in the midst of the deserts which gave her security, she sought to subdue Asia and the country of the Cushites and Libyans, and even the great island of Cyprus. She desired to control the sea. When indolent kings succeeded the glorious Pharaohs, priestly intrigue seated the high priest of Ammon upon the throne of Thebes, while another dynasty, the twenty-first, reigned at Tanis in the Delta. Thus divided, Egypt submitted to the influence of neighboring peoples instead of imposing her own. Her kings assumed Assyrian names, gave princesses of their blood to Solomon's harem, and surrounded themselves with a Libyan guard, which portioned out the country among its chiefs. The Cushites or Ethiopians took advantage of these discords to seize Upper Egypt. Sabaco, their prince, even captured King Bocchoris and burned him alive. "The vile race of Cushites," as the twenty-fifth dynasty, reigned for fifty years over all the land of the Pharaohs (715–655). Among their kings are Sebichus or Sua, whom Uzziah invoked against Shalmaneser, and Tharaka, who helped Hezekiah against Sennacherib. According to Manetho, a revolution drove the third successor of Sabaco back to Ethiopia. The leaders of this movement were natives of Sais and founded the twenty-sixth dynasty.

The Last Pharaohs. — Herodotus thus narrates the expulsion of the Ethiopians: "The last of the Ethiopian kings

was terrified by a dream, and fled to his native states, leaving the government of the country to the priest Sethos. At his death the warriors seized the supreme power and intrusted it to twelve of their number. Psammeticus, one of the twelve, overthrew his colleagues by means of Carian and Ionian pirates. Realizing the military superiority of the Greeks, he invited them in great numbers to the country, and thereby angered the native army, part of which emigrated to Ethiopia. Aided by the newcomers, he tried to recover Syria, and for twenty-eight years besieged Azoth, which he finally captured." Necho, his successor, attempted to complete Seti's canal and unite the Red Sea and Mediterranean. He caused the Phœnicians to circumnavigate Africa, and defeated Josiah, king of Judah, at Mageddo. Master of Palestine, he pushed on to the Euphrates, but was defeated by the Babylonians and lost all his conquests. The second of his successors, Apries, likewise failed in his attempts against the Cyrenians. His soldiers, believing themselves betrayed, installed in his place Amasis, one of their own number, under whom Egypt emitted a final gleam of brilliancy. Twenty thousand cities are then said to have covered the borders of the Nile. This prince gave the city of Naucratis to the Greeks, and entered into close relations with the Median, Lydian, and Babylonian kings, who were themselves menaced by a fresh invasion of the barbarous Persian mountaineers. He could not avert their ruin, and beheld the successive fall of Astyages, Crœsus, and Balthasar. The same fate awaited his own son, Psammeticus III., who, after a reign of six months, was overthrown by the Persian Cambyses (527).

Egypt under the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabs. — Since that day Egypt has never been independent, though often rebelling against the yoke of foreigners. An unruly province of Persia, she was conquered by Alexander, who founded the famous city which bears his name (331). The dynasty of the Ptolemies reigned gloriously for a century, and ingloriously twice as long. The Romans took their place after the death of Cleopatra (30 B.C.). In 381 A.D. an edict of Theodosius suppressed the religion of the Pharaohs. The temples were mutilated, the statues of the gods destroyed, and of one of the richest civilizations of the world nothing was left except the ruins, which at the present day we piously preserve.

Egypt, thus violently forced into Christianity, remained nominally Christian for two centuries and a half without finding peace. The Arabs brought Islam (640). It took definite root, and under the Fatimite caliphs the land enjoyed a brief splendor. Cairo, a city which they founded, still contains the largest Mussulman school in the world. Thrice has France touched the land, always leaving glorious recollections of herself: in the thirteenth century with Saint Louis; in the eighteenth with Bonaparte; in the nineteenth with Frenchmen who conquered Egypt by their science and opened to the commerce of the globe the Isthmus of Suez, thus grandly realizing the dream of a Pharaoh who had been dead thirty-five centuries!

Egyptian Religion, Government, and Art. — Two religions existed side by side, the one held by the people and the other by the priests. The former was coarse and material. It regarded certain animals, the ichneumon, ibis, crocodile, hippopotamus, cat, bull, and many more, as divine beings. It was the old African fetichism, though elevated by theogonic ideas, as is shown by those gods with the head of a dog or falcon, and by the worship of the bull Apis, "engendered by a flash of lightning." The latter religion sought to account for the mysterious phenomena of nature, and explained the good and evil encountered everywhere by the opposition of two principles as Osiris, the representative of all beneficent influences, and Typhon, the god of night and of evil days. It even seems at first to have taught belief in one God without beginning or end. The care taken by the Egyptians to preserve the bodies of the dead proves that they hoped for a future life. The inscriptions even speak of numerous rebirths, which recall the metempsychosis of the Hindus. But this idea of the absolute and eternal Being was veiled from the eyes of the people and the priests by the conception of a divine trinity, — Osiris or the sun, the principle of all life, Isis or nature, and Horus, their divine child. After once abandoning pure monotheism, the Egyptians glided rapidly down the descent of polytheism. The representations on their monuments and in their religious rites of a host of secondary divinities made them forget the chief god, of whose attributes the others had at first been merely symbols.

The government was a monarchy, all the stronger because

its kings, according to common belief, were participants of divinity. All were "Sons of the Sun," and in that capacity were chiefs of religion as well as of society.

Society had neither a sacerdotal nor aristocratic caste, nor a popular body which might form a counterpoise to the king. This state of affairs ended in the establishment of a certain number of classes, which were non-hereditary, but in which the son habitually remained in the father's state of life. Herodotus enumerated seven of these classes: priests, warriors, laborers, herdsmen, merchants, mariners, and, after Psammeticus, interpreters. There were, no doubt, many others. "Egypt," says Bossuet, "was the source of all good police regulation." We read in Diodorus that perjury was punished with death; that he who did not succor a man engaged in combat with an assassin, suffered the same penalty; that the slanderer was punished. Every Egyptian was obliged to deposit with a magistrate a document setting forth his means of livelihood, and a severe penalty discouraged false statements. The tongue of the spy, who betrayed state secrets to enemies, and both hands of counterfeiters, were cut off. In no case was accumulated interest allowed to exceed the capital; the property of the debtor, not his person, constituted the security for his debt. An Egyptian could borrow, giving his father's mummy as surety, and he who did not pay his debt was deprived of burial with his family.

The Egyptians successfully cultivated many industrial arts, as well as mechanics, geometry, and astronomy. They invented hieroglyphic writing, whose characters, at first simple figurative representations of objects or symbols of certain ideas, were completed by phonetic signs, which like our letters and syllables stood only for sounds. In painting they employed vivid colors, which time has not effaced. Some of their finest statues might rival those of Greece, did not a certain stiffness indicate a conventional art wherein liberty was lacking; but their architecture is unrivalled in its grand impressiveness. In proof are the temples of Thebes; the hall of Karnak, where the vault is supported by 140 colossal columns, many of which are seventy feet high and eleven feet in diameter; and the pyramids, one of which, 481 feet in height, is the most tremendous pile of stone ever heaped up by man. Further demonstration is furnished by the obelisks, the rock tombs,

the labyrinth, the enormous Sphinx, which measures twenty-six feet from the chin to the crown of the head, the dikes, the highways, the canals to contain or guide the waters of the Nile, and Lake Mœris. No people in ancient times moved so much earth and granite.

with its arts, its language, its customs, its civilization, all rescued from oblivion and attested by its numerous bas-reliefs and sculptures, which the Frenchman Botta discovered in 1844 at Mosoul, and which can now be wondered at in the Louvre.

Last Assyrian Empire. Capture of Babylon by Cyrus. — Babylon replaced Nineveh. Nebuchadnezzar, its king, won a glorious victory over the Egyptian Necho at Circesium. He destroyed Jerusalem (588), took Tyre after a siege of thirteen years, traversed Egypt as a conqueror, and adorned Babylon with magnificent monuments. His four successors reigned shamefully. Cyrus, king of the Persians, besieged Babylon and entered it by the bed of the Euphrates, which he had diverted from its channel (538). Instead of destroying the city, he made it one of his capitals. So did Alexander. The construction of Seleucia caused its abandonment by the Greek kings. To-day nothing is to be seen on the spot which it occupied except a heap of ruins, upon which the Arab rarely plants his tent, and which furnish a lair for the beasts of the desert. When the Parthians, and afterwards the Persians, raised the great Oriental Empire which the Romans were unable to overthrow, Ctesiphon was their royal residence. Each new sovereign authority gave birth to a new capital. Under the Arabian caliphs Bagdad was the queen of the Orient. It is still one of the great cities of the heir of the caliphs, the sultan of Constantinople.

Government, Religion, and Arts of Assyria. — The king of Nineveh or of Babylon was the absolute master of the life and possessions of his subjects. Such is the law of oriental monarchies. At least, on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, the king was not considered a deity, as on the banks of the Nile. Neither were there any castes, nor even a hierarchy of classes. Assyrian society was that sort of promiscuous mass which is not displeasing to despotism, because it permits the prince to raise or degrade whomsoever he sees fit.

At the base of the religion of these peoples, the idea of a single God can be descried; but there also this idea was concealed by a throng of secondary divinities, who are always the personification of some force of nature. In those immense plains of Chaldæa, where the horizon extends so far, under that cloudless sky, and during those

nights which the Orient makes so beautiful, because the stars shine there with a brilliancy unknown to us, the dominating worship was Sabianism, or the adoration of the stars. The sun, Baal, was the great god of the Assyrians, and in the celestial bodies they located spirits which exercised upon man and upon his destiny a powerful influence. Thus their priests had a great reputation as astronomers. To them we owe the zodiac, the division of the circle into 360 degrees, and that of the degree into sixty minutes, the calculation of lunar eclipses, the so-called table of Pythagoras, and a system of measures, weights, and money which served nearly all the commerce of the ancient world, since it was employed by the Phœnicians and the ancient Greeks. To them also we owe astrology, whereby they developed a lucrative trade through the sale of talismans or consecrated signs, supposed to give their possessors magical powers. The common people found the objects of their adoration nearer at hand. They had fish gods, like Oannes and Derceto, or bird gods, like the doves which typified Semiramis. The worship of Mylitta, the goddess of generation and fecundity, gave rise to abominable disorders by sanctifying the grossest sensual appetites.

The inhabitants, by their industry, their skilful agriculture, and their commerce, which two magnificent rivers favored, accumulated prodigious riches in this empire, so long the rival of the empire of the Pharaohs. The carpets of Babylon, its textile fabrics, its enamelled potteries, its amulets and canes, and its thousand objects of the goldsmith's art, were in great demand, even in the Roman Empire. The Assyrian sculptures reveal a degree of skill hardly suspected. Herodotus, visiting Egypt in the time of its full splendor, believed that the Greeks had derived their art and gods from the banks of the Nile. We now know that in the depths of Asia the origin of their religious ideas must be sought. Probably through Cilicia and Asia Minor Assyrian art reached the Greek Asiatic colonies, and from them awoke the genius of artists in the mother country. More than one sculpture at Athens recalls forms on the monuments of Khorsabad. The figures of Selinus, and even in a certain degree the marbles of Egina, seem to have been touched by the Ninevites.

VI

THE PHŒNICIANS

Phœnician Cities between Lebanon and the Sea. — Between the Euphrates and the western sea stretch the desert, which belonged to the Semitic nomads, and the Lebanon, the fertile valleys of which became the habitation of numerous Canaanitish tribes who originally occupied the shores of the Persian Gulf. The Phœnicians, near kinsmen of the Hebrews, the most famous of all these tribes, established themselves in the country of the Jordan, and on the farther side of the mountain chain on the narrow strip of coast which is bathed by the Mediterranean. The conquests of Joshua gave the valley of the Jordan to the Hebrews. Hemmed in between the mountains, whose venerable forests furnished the timber for the construction of ships, and the sea, which formed numerous harbors and invited to navigation and commerce, the Phœnicians became skilful mariners, both from necessity and natural situation. Their ships ploughed the Mediterranean. Population increased with general prosperity, and cities multiplied. Soon, both for the interests of commerce and to relieve the congestion of population, it became necessary to plant colonies at a distance. The most widely known of Phœnician cities were Sidon, whose glassware and purple were celebrated; Tyre, which held the highest rank; Aradus, Byblos, and Berytus. We learn from Holy Writ what luxury and effeminacy and what an impure and often sanguinary religion reigned in Phœnicia. Mothers burned their children alive in honor of Baal-Moloch, and the utmost license was approved by their chief goddess, Astarte.

Phœnician Commerce and Colonies. — But the Phœnicians offset their vices by industry and commerce, and above all by those colonies which so contributed to the expansion and progress of civilization. They established themselves in the Ægean islands long before the Greeks; founded counting-houses in Africa, Spain, Gaul, and Sicily; and profited

by the commerce of Arabia, India, and Ethiopia. In the fifth century they still possessed in Sicily the three cities of Motya, Selinus and Panormus. In Gaul the traces of their settlement vanished early, but they covered the whole south of Spain, then so rich in silver mines, with their colonies. On the African coast rose Leptis, Adrumetum, Utica, and Carthage, the new Tyre, which became the most powerful maritime state of antiquity, and forced the neighboring Phœnician colonies to acknowledge its supremacy. While Carthage thus monopolized the commerce of the western Mediterranean, the Phœnicians of the mother country shared with the Greeks that of the eastern Mediterranean, and endeavored to form closer relations with the countries washed by the Indian Ocean. They forced the Jews to cede to them two ports on the Red Sea, Eliath and Eziongeber, whence their fleets sailed to seek ivory and gold dust in the land of Ophir, incense and spices in Arabia Felix, the most beautiful pearls then known in the Persian Gulf, and in India a thousand precious wares. For them numerous caravans traversed Babylonia, Arabia, Persia, Bactriana, and Thibet, whence they brought back the silk of China, which sold for its weight in gold, the furs of Tartary, and the precious stones of India. They added to this commerce the products of their national industry in glass, purple, and a thousand articles of attire.

Conquerors of Phœnicia. — This prosperity of Phœnicia excited the cupidity of invaders. She was conquered by the Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty. The Assyrians many times appeared under the walls of Tyre, which was taken by Sennacherib, almost ruined by Nebuchadnezzar, and destroyed by Alexander. Phœnicia found herself almost lost in the vast empires of the Persians, the Seleucidæ, and the Romans; but, placed between two great centres of civilization, Egypt and Assyria, she took from them and carried to the West whatever they had best developed. She diffused something of the art, the industry, the science, of those two nations. Above all she took from Babylon a metric system, the necessary agent of commerce, and from Memphis the idea and form of alphabetical writing, which so many peoples have copied and modified, and which has been the indispensable instrument of intellectual progress.