

EGYPT AS IT IS.

CHAPTER I.

TERRITORY.

Sir Bartle Frere's Testimony to Recent Egyptian Progress—Territory has Shared in the General Development—Boundaries of Egypt Proper—Extension South of These—Present Divisions—The Delta—The Northern Lakes—Middle Egypt—The Fayoum—The Saïd—Philæ—The Eastern Desert—The Oases—Red Sea Coast—Geological Divisions—Nile Soil—Nubia to the Soudan—Total Extent of Present Territory.

“THERE is one Arab Power to which the eyes of all friends of Africa naturally turn with hopefulness. Egypt has ever been the great centre of African civilisation in the hands of the present dynasty, which may fairly be said to represent much that is excellent in European civilisation. Of the enormous increase of the aggregate wealth of the country there can be no doubt. Steam and railways have done at least as much for Egypt as for almost any European country.” In the progress thus attested by so competent a witness as Sir Bartle Frere,* lies the *raison d'être* of the present volume. On Egypt of the past and the charms of modern travel—if the lotus-life of Nile voyaging can be so called—from the Mediterranean to the Cataracts a whole literature has been written; but the shelves of the British Museum may be searched in vain for any comprehensive account of the economical

* At the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, January 5, 1874.

state of the country *as it is*. Yet this New Egypt, which has risen not on the ruins of, but side by side with the imperishable old—railways and telegraphs, sugar factories and cotton-gins mingling not incongruously with pyramids, rock-tombs, temples, and hieroglyphs dating from before Abraham—is rich beyond any other part of Africa in practical interest to the capitalist and the politician. There, in the northern extremity of this great continent, as nowhere else but in our own colonies of the south, the new civilisation has taken root, and, slow as necessarily is its growth in a soil impoverished by so long a barbarism, it already gives promise of a strength and expansiveness which have no parallel in the East.

In any attempt to sketch the outcome, thus far, of this great national revival, the country itself first claims notice, not alone as the scene of the changes in progress, but as having also largely shared in the development. A glance, therefore, at the area over which this salutary revolution is at work may conveniently precede some detailed statement of its results. The limits of the territory now subject to the Khedive can, however, be only approximately fixed. Egypt proper is bounded definitely enough on the north by the Mediterranean, from Cape Hazaïf to El-Arish on the frontier of Palestine; westward, by the Libyan desert; east, by a line drawn from El-Arish to Akabah at the head of the gulf of that name, and thence enclosing the peninsula of Sinai, down the western shore of the Red Sea to Cape Benas; and on the south by the First Cataract, between Assouan and Philæ. But the regular parallelogram thus described forms less than one-fifth of the whole geographical area over which the Cairo Government now claims dominion. In 1821-2, an expedition under Ismail Pasha, the third son of Mehemet Ali, over-ran and annexed Nubia; and since then have been added the

whole of the western coast of the Red Sea, and that of the Indian Ocean as far as Berbera, opposite Aden, and inland the Nile basin, anywhere between Khartoum and the Equator.* But beyond Khartoum, the authority of the Khedive is as yet only in course of consolidation, and no definite line can be drawn as its exact southern boundary. Practically, however, its limit may for the present be fixed at Gondokoro (lat. 4° 55' N.), beyond which Gordon Pasha is now operating to complete the work begun by Sir Samuel Baker, by effectively annexing the country between that point and the shores of the Albert and Victoria Lakes. A rough extension of the western boundary line from the parallel of Philæ, up through the Desert, so as to include Darfour, the Darfertit country, Gondokoro, and the territory south of Sennaar, round continuously with Abyssinia to the Red Sea at Massowah, would therefore more or less accurately describe the present limits of Egyptian sovereignty towards the Equator. A glance at the map will show that the vast tract of Eastern Africa thus enclosed measures more than 1,600 miles from north to south, and has an average breadth of about 350 miles from the Red Sea into the Libyan desert.

* "History teaches us that Egypt is bounded on the north by the Mediterranean, and on the south by the Cataract of Assouan. But history, in fixing these limits, does not take into account the indications furnished both by geography and ethnography. At the north-east of the African continent, from the sea to the Equator, there extends an immense tract of country formed by the Nile, and fertilised by it alone. On the other hand, of the various races that people the banks of the river, some are uncivilised, savage, and incapable of governing themselves, while on this side of the tropic we meet with a nation which, on the contrary, merits the admiration of mankind on account of its glory, its industry, and all the elements of civilisation contained in it. History then ought rather to say that Egypt extends wherever the Nile flows, and that consequently Egypt has the right to claim as her domain all the countries watered by this celebrated river as far as they extend towards the south."—Mariette Bey *Aperçu de l'Histoire d'Égypte*, 1872.

But interesting as may be the future of the great group of countries within this area south of Egypt proper, two-thirds of it are as yet little more than a geographical expression. Now, as fifty years ago, the "Egypt" both of politics and trade is still confined to the Delta and the rich river valley between its apex and Assouan, and to a description of the present condition of these the following pages will be mainly limited.

The old territory, then, of the Pharaohs, of the Ptolemies, the Cæsars, the Arabian Caliphs, the Turks, and now of the Khedive, lies within lat. $31^{\circ} 37'$ and $24^{\circ} 3' N.$, between the Mediterranean and the First Cataract, above which the Nile, issuing from the rocky glen of Nubia, sweeps in a smooth but rapid stream round the little island of Philæ, and then, a couple of miles below, hurries down the rapids* of Assouan—Juvenal's Syene—into the *Mizraim* of the Hebrews, the *Misr* of its present possessors, and the *Egypt* of western geography. The country whose southern boundary is thus definitely fixed, properly divides itself into Upper and Lower Egypt, the latitude of Cairo ($30^{\circ} 6' N.$) being the most obvious line of demarcation; but modern geographers and the actual Government have recognised the ancient distribution into three provinces, now respectively called Lower, Middle, and Upper Egypt—*El-Bahari*, *El-Vostani*, and *El-Saïd*—the further administrative subdivisions of which will in due course be described. In point of area, fertility, and commercial activity, the first of

* These Nile cataracts, of which there are in all seven, are not in fact cataracts at all, but mere rapids, in which the stream is obstructed by broken ridges of rock that rise above its surface and vex it into whirling eddies which, though difficult and even dangerous of passage, have no resemblance to the tremendous "falls" of the great American rivers. This First Cataract of Assouan consists of a series of such obstructions extending over three miles, from the small island of Sehayl up to within two miles of Philæ, and the entire descent over the whole distance is only about seventy feet.

these three main divisions to which, because of its triangular shape, the Greeks gave its name of the Delta, is the most important section of the country. The base of the irregular triangle enclosed within the two branches of the river, and to which this name strictly applies, is only eighty-one miles long, and its entire area about 2,000 square miles. The complete shore-line of this larger district extends for about a hundred and sixty miles along the old historic sea from the well-known landmark named the "Arab's Tower" to the ruins of Pelusium; but the actual territory of Egypt stretches considerably farther east and west. This coast-line includes the three ports of Alexandria, Rosetta, and Damietta, to which has now to be added that of Port Saïd at the entrance of the Suez Canal. Inland, this fine district tapers to a point near the village of Om-el-Dinar, close to which—about eighty miles from the sea and twelve below Cairo—the Nile divides into the two great branches which, flowing respectively north-west and north-east, enter the Mediterranean at Rosetta and Damietta.* The five other ancient mouths of the river have long ago silted up, and their courses can now be hardly traced over the great alluvial plain and through the network of canals and lakes which interpose between the sea and this point.† Strictly, Alexandria lies outside the Delta, but in common phrase

* In the time of Herodotus the apex of the Delta was at Cercasorum, ten miles below Memphis, or six miles higher up than at present.

† The seven estuaries known to the ancients were—1, the Canopic, corresponding to the present outlet from Lake Etko, or, according to others, to that of the Aboukir or Maadée Lake; 2, the Bolbotine mouth at Rosetta; 3, the Sebenitic, probably the opening into the present Lake Bourlos; 4, the Phatnitic or Bucolic, at Damietta; 5, the Mendesian, which is lost in Lake Menzaleh, the mouth of which is represented by that of Debeh; 6, the Tanitic or Saitic, some traces of which are visible eastwards of Lake Menzaleh, under the modern name of Om-Faridjé; and 7, the Pelusaic, which seems to be represented by what is now the most easterly outlet of Lake Menzaleh, where the ruins of Pelusium are still visible.

the latter includes the whole of the cultivable lands as well east and west of, as within, the two branches of the river. Some description will be given further on of the magnificent harbour works now in progress, which, when completed, will render this fine port the safest and most commodious in the Mediterranean. Enough here to say that the predictions of its decadence after the opening of the Suez Canal have been wholly falsified, and that with a population of more than 212,000, railway communication with all parts of the interior, and a steadily increasing trade, this historic city is recovering much of its former prosperity, and is rapidly becoming, in fact as in name, the Liverpool of the East. The position of Rosetta and Damietta is of course much inferior, the bars at their respective mouths of the Nile confining their trade within narrow limits, but the official statistics show both to be making steady growth in industrial and commercial activity. The chief inland towns of the section are Tanta, Zagazig, Damanhour, and Mansourah, to which subsequent allusion will be made.

The fertile land of the Delta is separated from the Mediterranean by a chain of brackish lagoons which are themselves fenced in from the sea by narrow belts of rock and sand-bank, on which a few wild and stunted date-palms form the only vegetation. The chief of these lakes are Mareotis, Etko, Bourlos, and Menzaleh. The first is the most western, and though now little more than a salt marsh—except during the inundation, when its contents are swelled by filtration—it was up to about 200 years ago navigable, and contributed considerably to the commercial importance of Alexandria, immediately behind which it lies. A project for the drainage of this lake has been mooted, but although a vast tract of valuable land would thus be reclaimed to cultivation, the cost of the work will

probably postpone for some years any attempt to carry it out. Lake Etko, a few miles farther east, is only separated from the sea by a still narrower strip of shore, and when nearly full, during the inundation, spreads up to the town of Rosetta. Bourlos, also close along the sea, extends more than forty miles east of the latter town, with an average but irregular width of nearly ten miles, and, like the others, is shallow throughout. Lake Menzaleh, the most eastern and largest of the series, extends from near Damietta to the mouth of the old Tanitic branch, for about forty miles in length by eighteen in width. It is deeper than the other lakes, and supports a considerable fishing population in the villages and islands along its southern shore. Altogether a frontier of nearly 200 miles is covered by these lagoons.

Immediately above the village of Om-el-Dinar, the Delta narrows into the valley of Middle Egypt, which contains Cairo, the Pyramids, the fine province of the Fayoum, and the broad belt of cultivated and fertile land on both banks of the river, as high up as Manfalout. The average width of the whole cultivable valley above Cairo to Assouan is about six miles, but at some points it much exceeds this; while at others the hills which almost continuously flank the river on both sides, close in upon it so as to narrow the arable space to less than a mile. The eastern of these ranges rises, northwards, near the Isthmus of Suez, whence it approaches Cairo in the spur called the Jebel-Mokattam, which trends round towards the river a few miles above the city, and then, following the winding course of the stream, skirts it, with occasional breaks, far up into Nubia. The best known of the openings in this range are the so-called Valley of the Wanderings, leading from the neighbourhood of Cairo to the head of the Gulf of Suez; and, higher up, the defile through which pass the caravan

routes from Kenneh and Coft to Cosseir. Westwards the Libyan range first approaches the river in nearly the same latitude from the direction of the Fezzan, south of Tripoli, and similarly flanks it, though less closely, up to far beyond Philæ. About eighty miles by river above Cairo, nearly due west of Beni-souef, a deep sinuosity in this chain forms the splendid valley of the Fayoum, which has been justly called the Garden of Egypt. The most fertile tracts of the Delta fall below this specially favoured district, which, abundantly watered by an artificial cut from the Nile, and a complete network of canals, blooms over its whole area of nearly 700 square miles, with the most varied luxuriant vegetation. The Fayoum, in fact, enjoys a pre-eminence as to soil and products over nearly every other part of Egypt. Besides yielding rice and grain in equal abundance with the other provinces, it abounds in dates, flax, cotton, the vine, and almost every variety of fruit. It is also famous for its plantations of roses, the rose-water from which forms one of its chief exports to Cairo and the Levant. In the north-western extremity of this fine province is the large lake called the Birket-el-Korn, thirty-five miles long by five or six broad, which some antiquarians have confounded with the sacred lake Moeris, now dried up, and the site of which was long doubtful till satisfactorily identified by Linant Bey. The water of the Birket-el-Korn is brackish, and contributes little or nothing to the fertility of the surrounding region. Besides its capital, Medinet—anciently, first Crocodopolis and then Arsinoë—the Fayoum reckons seventy other towns and villages, the whole of which are densely peopled. From this great bend in the Libyan range a caravan route leads westwards to the Little Oasis, and higher up other breaks occur behind Girgheh and Esneh, through which tracks pass to the Oases of Dakhleh and Khargheh ;

while openings of lesser note afford communication with other fertile spots that dot the depressed region west of the river, and to which allusion will presently be made.

Returning to the Nile, the valley from Beni-souef up to Manfalout forms a tract of great beauty and fertility, thickly studded with towns and villages on both sides of the river. West of Minieh, the thriving capital of an extensive district, a large swamp called the Bathen stretches upwards to Achmounein, which Sicard and D'Anville have on very fanciful grounds sought to identify with Lake Moeris. Thence on, past the rock-tombs of Beni-hassan, the ruins of Antinoë and Hermopolis Magna, and the large village of Mellawee to Manfalout, where Middle Egypt ends, the same uniformity of fertile river bank, varying only in width, continues. A few miles higher up the voyager reaches the flourishing town of Assiout, the capital of Upper Egypt, and the chief *entrepôt* of the caravan trade between Cairo, Darfour, and Sennaar. Above this, the valley narrows into the proportions of a mountain glen, in which at several points the eastern range, especially, presses close upon the stream. In this section of the country occur, after the Pyramids, its most famous monumental remains—the temple ruins of Abydos, Denderah, Thebes, Esneh, Edfou, Koum-Ombos, and Elephantina—the shattered but still splendid memorials of a dead faith and civilisation with which the world can nowhere else show anything to compare, but further notice of which forms no part of the purpose of this volume. Behind Kenneh, on the eastern bank opposite Denderah, the valley widens into a broad fertile plain, and the Nile here makes its nearest approach to the Red Sea, at a distance of only eighty miles from the little port of Cosseir. Thence upwards, beyond Thebes to Assouan, the cultivable land on either side contracts almost to the river bank ; until, above the First Cata-