

## CHAPTER II.

## POPULATION.

Diversity of Races—Conflicting Estimates of Total—Census of 1859—Rate of Increase—Present Estimated Totals—Fellaheen—Bedoween—Copts—Abysinians—Nubians—Jews—Rayah Greeks—Syrians—Armenians—Foreigners—Industrial Distributions of the Whole.

WHATEVER may have been the origin of the ancient Egyptians—whether Semitic or Aryan, as ethnologists much dispute—their modern successors are many-raced, and no two estimates of their number agree. Arabs, Copts, Turks, Nubians, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Levantines of every shade of mixed Eastern and European blood, they have been variously computed at from 1,500,000 by Sir Gardiner Wilkinson, to 5,250,000 by the latest official Egyptian returns.\* But when the former of these estimates was made no trustworthy statistics existed; and it can only therefore be regarded as the random guess of an otherwise well-informed observer, based on assumptions which later investigation has shown to be incorrect. So, too, with Mr. Lane's reckoning of less than 2,000,000 made nearly fifty years ago;† not only did that exclude the Arab tribes on both sides of the Nile, who, although nomad, pay regular taxes to the Government and otherwise acknowledge its authority, but it considerably reduced the totals of the various settled communities as estimated by their respective

\* *Statistique de l'Egypte*, 1873.

† *Modern Egyptians*, i. 32.

chiefs. A few years later, M. Mengin, a French historian of the reign of Mehemet Ali, computed the whole at nearly 2,900,000; but although his estimate had the advantage of being based on an official return of the number of houses throughout the country, he demonstrably under-numbered the quota of heads per house in all the chief towns of Lower Egypt, besides repeating Mr. Lane's omission of the entire nomad population. Strabo and Diodorus, reasoning from the cultivable area of the country, its extreme fertility, the great fecundity of Egyptian women, and the evidently vast amount of disposable labour, reckoned the population under the Pharaohs at between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000, and modern criticism has accepted the estimate as proximately exact. Clot Bey, writing in 1840 with all the materials for a judgment up to that date before him, reckoned the decadence since the Persian conquest at about one-half, leaving a then total of between 3,000,000 and 4,000,000.\* But making full allowances for the waste of life consequent on the many revolutions through which the country has passed, and for the more modern losses occasioned by the internecine feuds of the Mamlouks and the campaigns of Mehemet Ali, there is still reason to believe that, even thirty-seven years ago, the total population exceeded the larger of these estimates. A rough census taken in 1859, during the viceroyalty of Saïd Pasha, returned the whole inhabitants of Egypt proper at 5,125,000; and allowing for even a considerable margin of error in that computation, there would still remain nearly 5,000,000 as the population strength of the country three years before the accession of the present Khedive. Since then the cholera epidemic of 1865 and the typhus pest that followed it

\* *Aperçu Général sur l'Egypte*, i. 166.

swept away about 100,000, but the steady and increasing excess of births over deaths has much more than recouped the loss thus occasioned. The latest official returns show that, while this gain of life over death averaged annually 33,470 during the ten years ending 1861, it had, through better sanitary administration and general improvement in the material condition of the country, risen in the five following years to 46,902, and in 1867-71 to 63,296—a rate of increase, as compared with Europe, which is inferior only to that of Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, and Sweden during the corresponding period, and which, if continued, would double the existing population in less than sixty years.\* It is evident, therefore, that if the census returns of 1859 were even approximately accurate, the present inhabitants of Egypt proper must number rather over than under 5,500,000. Of Nubia and the Upper Nile countries only the very roughest estimate can be formed, on a mean of the conjectures of various travellers, from Bruce and Burkhart to Baker and Nachtigal, which would give for the whole another 10,000,000 or 11,000,000. But although these southern provinces will undoubtedly form important factors in the future of Egyptian politics, their present economical value is small as compared with the territory below Philæ, and no more precise estimate of either the number or ethnological distributions of their inhabitants need, therefore, be here attempted.

No official classification of the population of Egypt proper has been published, but the following is believed to be approximately correct:

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\* Although the collection of accurate statistics is as yet very imperfectly organised in Egypt, in the matter of births and deaths the registration is very careful, and these figures—quoted from the periodical return made to the Defter-khana (State Archive Department)—may be accepted as sufficiently exact.

Settled Arabs (fellaheen) . . . . .	4,500,000
Bedoween . . . . .	300,000
Turks . . . . .	10,000
Copts . . . . .	500,000*
Abyssinians . . . . .	3,000
Nubians and Soudanis (mostly slaves) . . . . .	40,000
Jews . . . . .	20,000
Rayah Greeks . . . . .	20,000
Syrians . . . . .	7,000
Armenians . . . . .	10,000
Various foreigners . . . . .	90,000
Total, about	<u>5,500,000</u>

Of the dozen or more elements which thus constitute the present motley population of the country, the settled *Arabs*, who form four-fifths of the whole, although one in creed, are nearly as diverse in race as the minor communities which complete the tale. Two-thirds of them may be set down as descendants of the Copts who embraced Islam after the Arab conquest (A.D. 640), or who have since apostatised, and by intermarriage have long ago fused with their conquerors and with the Moslem immigration from east and west. The actual army of Amrou was small, and, though mostly of pure Arabian blood from the neighbourhood of Medina, would have been swamped in this great conversion but for the influx of whole tribes of other Arabs from the Hedjaz, from Mauritania, and the coasts, who gradually mixed with and more or less assimilated the ex-Coptic element in the districts where they settled, and together formed the great labouring class of the fellaheen. These immigrants did not, however, completely amalgamate among themselves, and

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\* This estimate is based on a statement made to the writer by the Coptic Bishop of Cairo.

even yet the much finer physique of the fellahs of Lower and Middle Egypt—the Arab element in whom descends mostly from the tribes that came originally from beyond the Red Sea—distinguishes them clearly from the Moorish Moghrebees of the Saïd. Amongst the town populations the distinction of tribes has been almost wholly lost, but traces of it are to be met with in the remoter villages, where many old customs of their desert ancestry still survive. Physically, the fellaheen—with the distinction noted in favour of Lower as compared with Upper Egypt—are a fine muscular race, the average height of the men being from five feet eight to five feet nine inches, and that of the women in proportion. Under nine or ten years of age, most of the children have very spare limbs and distended abdomens, but as they grow up their forms rapidly improve, and in full age the majority, as a rule, become remarkably well-proportioned—with fine oval faces, bright deep-set black eyes, straight thick noses, large but well-formed mouths, full lips, beautiful teeth, broad shoulders, and well-shaped limbs. From twelve—the usual age of marriage—to eighteen or nineteen, nearly all the women are splendidly formed, and many of them are of real beauty; but once past their 'teens they rapidly wither, and as a rule are little better than wrinkled hags before thirty—a fact on which a recent writer is liberal and philosophical enough to base a strong apology for polygamy.\* In Cairo and throughout the larger towns of the Delta, those who have not been much exposed to the sun have a clear olive complexion and a very delicate skin, but the less sheltered villagers are of a more bronzed and coarser hue. In Middle Egypt the colour is still darker, and in the Saïd it deepens, towards the Nubian frontier, to the tint of a Barbadienne bronze. Time and

\* *Egypt of the Pharaohs and of the Khedive*, pp. 323, 324.

dynastic revolutions have wrought but little change in either the condition or character of this great mass of the Egyptian population. As they were under the Pharaohs, the Ptolemies, the Romans, and the Caliphs, so in the main are they now—the most patient, the most pacific, the most home-loving, and withal the merriest race in the world. In this latter respect the oppression of more than forty centuries has failed to damp their natural buoyancy of spirit; and nowhere more than amid the mud huts and seemingly abject poverty of a fellah village does “the human heart vindicate its strong right to be glad.” The men are temperate and honest, but the women, if not quite meriting Lane’s harsh judgment that they are “the most licentious of all females who lay claim to be considered as members of a civilised nation,” have at least long lost the robust virtue of the Bedoweeyeh, and as a class, while physically the finest, are said to be ethically the frailest of their sex in the Nile Valley. It is the fashion to write and speak of this large section of the Khedive’s subjects as being intolerably oppressed, ground down by crushing taxation, and generally wretched beyond any parallel elsewhere. This exaggeration has, no doubt, its origin mainly in the superficial impressions of strangers, who, coming fresh from Europe—where, in a different civilisation, a totally different standard of peasant life prevails—discover in the scant clothing, the simple food, and the primitive huts of these Egyptian ryots evidences of altogether special misery and administrative abuse. But no inferences could well be more fallacious. Apart from the fact that these external features accord with the climate, and have been stereotyped since before the Pyramids were built, it may be affirmed that the general condition of the fellaheen will compare favourably with that of almost any other peasantry in the East. If

economical facts prove anything at all, the vast increase in the agricultural and other exports of the past dozen years, and the nearly corresponding return outlay on European manufactured goods, demonstrate a measure of material improvement among the producing classes which may be vainly sought for elsewhere out of Europe. That the taxation is heavy—but not oppressive—is admitted; and that, until lately, the methods of its collection have been often brutal may also be conceded. But, apart from the traditional cruelty of tax-gathering all the East over, the Egyptian peasant has been noted in all time, from Cheops to Ismail, for his unwillingness to pay taxes at all. It is, in fact, a point of honor to bear any amount of “stick,” if by so doing the impost, or any part of it, can be evaded. The fellah, indeed, who will not do so is despised by even his own wife as a poltroon, and if, after only a dozen or score of blows, he disgorges the coin which endurance of fifty might perhaps have saved, the conjugal estimate of his spirit is shared generally by his fellows. Hence a difficulty of no trifling importance in the way of the new financial administration. Those who know Egypt best believe that nothing short of “stick logic” will, as a rule, persuade a fellah to pay his dues, be they ever so equitable; and if Mr. Romaine and his colleagues will not use it, the chances are much against the revenue.

But a much wider line than that which marks the difference of origin between the two sections of the settled Arab population separates both from the *Bedoween*, who represent those of the original immigration who retained their old nomad habits and, with them, much of the proud independence that distinguishes the race everywhere from Barbary to Oman. These number in all some sixty tribes roughly estimated at about 300,000 strong,

the whole of whom, since the vigorous action taken against them by Mehemet Ali, are in complete subjection to the Government, and the desert on both sides of the Nile is now as safe for caravans or even private travellers as are the streets of Alexandria and Cairo. The most powerful tribes are the Ababdehs and Bisharis, who claim patrimonial rights over the great eastern wilderness south of the parallel of Cosseir, far up into Nubia; the Henadi or Henadouehs, whose territory extends northwards to the latitude of Beni-souef; the Mehaz, the Serrâbria, and the Quattâb, thence down to Cairo; and the Halaybis and Beni-Ali, who divide between them the desert east of the Delta to the Syrian frontier. Across the Gulf of Suez, the Tor Arabs of Sinai are probably the friendly tribe, miscalled Midianites, who guided Moses as far as Ezion Geber on the Gulf of Akabah; and, beyond them, the Alawin—the hostile Edomites who refused him passage through their country and compelled the long *détour* round the east side of Mount Hor. But these, too, are now as obedient to the Government of Cairo as their fellow-nomads in Egypt proper, and where the Israelites were turned back Cook’s and Gaze’s tourists pass safely on payment of a trifling *backsheesh* to the local sheikh. Few or none of these tribes are stationary, except on the skirts of the wilderness, where they pass some months of the year on the green spots with their flocks and herds, cultivating patches of grain-land, and visiting the neighbouring towns for the purposes of traffic. The latest published returns of the movements of these nomads states the number of those who thus camped during the year on the border of the settled districts at 40,000, of whom above 19,000 visited the province of Esneh, and nearly 6,000 the Fayoum. For convenience of pasturage, each tribe is broken into subdivisions of from forty to one hundred