

which this chapter opened—that whatever may be the temporary financial embarrassments of Egypt, they have had no part of their origin in any decline of her trade. The resources of the country were never in modern times more abundant, nor its commercial movements more healthily active than at this moment, when the market price of its unified debt is yielding an interest of 14 per cent.

As regards the Customs duties on this large aggregate of trade, these are regulated by the existing commercial treaties between the Porte and the foreign Powers, which fix the import duty at 8 per cent., and the export rate at 1 per cent. ; but under his new prerogative the Khedive can now negotiate his own tariffs ; and it is expected that those at present in force will shortly be readjusted in a manner which, while advantageous to revenue, will also benefit trade by a more equitable system of valuation than is now applied. Certain it is, too, that if the Egyptian Government is to keep faith with its creditors, it must be permitted to enforce the collection of its Customs revenue without the vexatious restrictions with which not a few of the foreign Consuls at present practically assist fraud at Alexandria.

CHAPTER IX.

AGRICULTURE.

This has always been the Staple Industry of Egypt—Its Present Principal Conditions—Land Tenure—Its Varieties and Chief Incidents—Extent of Land held under each—Their Respective Rent Charges—Large Taxable Reserve in the Tithe Lands—Labour Supply—Sufficient with certain Reforms—Wages—Water-supply wholly dependent on the Nile—"Good" and "Bad" Niles—How the Inundation is controlled—Sakkias, Shadoofs, and Taboots—Their Antiquity—Great Economy of Labor if they were replaced by Cheap Machinery—Methods of Cultivation still Rude—Cotton Culture—Capability of its Expansion—Cereals—Their Varieties and Yield—Non-Cereal Crops—Average Gross Value of Produce—With Improved Irrigation, Area of Cultivation may be Largely Increased.

ALTHOUGH anciently as famous for her manufactures as for her husbandry, in all modern time the latter alone has been the staple industry of Egypt. Her old skill in the productive arts, which once surpassed that of Sidon and Tyre, has long been forgotten, and in the almost complete absence of mineral resources, for more than three thousand years agriculture has been the chief support of her people and the main source of revenue to her Government. Before describing the methods and results of this great industry as at present carried on, it will be convenient to notice some of the principal conditions under which it is worked. These vary to some extent in different parts of the country, but they may be generally grouped under the four heads of—land tenure, rent, labour, and water-supply.

The first of these underwent but little change from the settlement made at the Arab conquest, which was the ordinary Moslem division of the conquered territory into

kharadjieh (tributary), *oushurieh* (tithe), and *wakf*, or mosque lands—till Mehemet Ali (in 1808) arbitrarily abolished all private title and declared the Government owner, not merely in fee but in usufruct, of almost the whole land of Egypt, giving instead a mere life-pension to the proprietors. This huge act of confiscation was, however, reversed by Saïd Pasha, who also abolished nearly all the monopolies established by his father, and old tenures thereupon revived. The first of these is a sort of copyhold which pays the full *miri*, or land-tax, and the second a freehold that pays only the *oushur*, a much lighter quit-rent supposed to represent a tithe of its produce. The theory of Mohammedan law being that the fee-simple of the soil is in the sovereign, as personifying the State, the *kharadjieh* class is that portion of it whose usufruct only has been granted in consideration of a tribute, or rent, to private individuals, at first merely as crown tenants for life, but in course of time with the permitted right of sale and transmission to heirs. A condition of this tenure, however, is that five—formerly three—years' failure to pay the land-tax forfeits the tenancy, and the estate *ipso facto* lapses to the Government, which in such cases usually sells it to another occupier at the price of the arrears. This category includes about 3,500,000 of the whole 4,800,000 feddans of land now under cultivation in Egypt. The *oushurieh* class, on the other hand, consists of grants originally made in fee to the favourites of the sovereign, either tax-free or subject only to a low tithe-rent, averaging about one-third of the *miri* paid on the other category. To this also now belong the sub-classes of *abadieh* and *ouassieh* lands, the former of which were waste lands granted on condition of culture, free of taxes for six or eight years, after which they became chargeable with the usual imposts of their

quality; and the latter, life estates given chiefly to Government functionaries, also tax-free, which formerly lapsed on the death of the grantee, but of late years have been allowed to pass to his heirs. Under the operation of the new Moukabala law, both these have been assimilated to the older lands held under this tenure, and now pay the same rate of tithe. All the great Mamlouk Beys owned vast tracts of these *ouassieh* lands, and after the destruction of the caste in 1811 Mehemet Ali bestowed more than 200,000 feddans of their confiscated estates on his own retainers. Altogether, the *oushur* only is now paid on about 125,000 feddans, or rather more than one-fourth of the whole cultivated area of the country.

The considerable aggregate of *wakf* property is held under a special tenure called *el-kizkah*, and is exempt from both land-tax and tithe. It consists of that portion of the land which, at the conquest, was assigned to the mosque for the support of religious worship, of schools, hospitals, and other charitable foundations, and which was subsequently increased by donations during life or bequests at death by pious Moslems, for a similar object. The conditions under which this class of property is held are these: As a house or farm falls in, it is sold, charged with a rent nearly equivalent to the *oushur*, and descends from the purchaser to his heirs, or may be sold by him during his lifetime; but in default of heirs, or on the ultimate failure of these in any subsequent generation, the property again lapses to the *wakf*, and is sold for its benefit as before. These pious gifts were originally made in trust to members of the Ulema or other high religious functionaries, but already before Mehemet Ali's time the trusts had been so abused that the old reformer cancelled the whole and vested the property in official administrators; but these proved no better than their predecessors,

and have since been further superseded by a regular Ministry, by which what remains of it is now managed. The ruinous condition of most of the mosques in the capital and throughout the provinces shows to what an extent these endowments have suffered, and supplies a strong argument for their complete secularisation, as the only means of making the most of them in the interest both of Church and State. But of this reform there is no early prospect, and its effect therefore as regards either the mosque or the Treasury need not be discussed.

Both *kharadjieh* and *oushurieh* lands have been affected by the Moukabala law of 1871, in that, besides the extinction of half their respective taxes which will result from it in 1885, their owners will then receive what may be called parliamentary titles to their estates, confirming absolutely the advantages which modern usage has won from the old Moslem law.

The *rent-charges* on the soil thus held vary according to the class to which the land belongs, and again widely according to the quality of the land itself. Thus, while the land-tax on *kharadjieh* holdings average about 22s. per feddan, it ranges from 26s. 5d. in the province of Ghizeh to 14s. 10d. in Esneh; the difference being explained in part by the quality of the soil, but mainly by the greater facility of irrigation. Similarly the tithe charge on *oushurieh* lands, while averaging about 7s. per feddan, varies from 11s. 8d. in the mudirlik of Galioubieh to 2s. 10d. in that of Esneh. A further charge of about a dollar per feddan all round—but varying in actual amount according as the land lies high or low—is made on both classes for water, to cover the cost of materials employed in making and maintaining the canals and dykes; but as no portion of this extra assessment goes to the Treasury, neither it nor the further tax in labour, which, as will be presently

mentioned, is levied for the same purpose by the district councils and engineers, can be fairly included in any estimate of rent-charge. Both are to be debited to irrigation, which, even where steam pumps are not employed, represents on an average more than half the whole cost of farming in Egypt. This distinction being observed, 22s. an acre for such land as the average of that in the Delta and Upper Nile Valley cannot be considered high, still less excessive. Labour and the cost of living are cheap, below the lowest European standard, and if only a *fixed rent* were levied, the land would well bear, and its occupiers would willingly pay, a still heavier tax. For the bane of the situation hitherto has been that the *miri*, although nominally fixed, has meant just as much as the collecting *saraffs* could squeeze out of the smaller cultivators, the large ones being generally able to protect themselves. Hence most of the oppressive iniquity which has so much discredited Egyptian fiscal administration. One great advantage this has, however, for both the tax-payer and the Treasury as compared with the system of tax-farming and collection in kind which obtains in Turkey; in Egypt neither the land-tax nor the tithe is farmed out, and both as a rule are paid in money, so that whatever may be the intermediate pilferings of *saraffs*, the Cairo Malieh mainly benefits by any excess of zeal in the collection, and the fellahs are, at least, never plundered cent. per cent., nor their harvest ruined by the designed delay of the *oushurdjee*. Only those who know how viciously the Turkish system works* can estimate the advantage which the Egyptian peasant enjoys in this respect over his fellow-cultivator in Syria or

* In Turkey the *dime*—nominally a tenth, but in reality oftener an eighth, or even a fifth, of the gross produce—is collected in kind, under the vicious system of tax-farming, which, it is estimated, costs the peasantry 100 for every 50 received by the Porte.

Asia Minor. Unlike, too, the fluctuations which attend the annual sales of the *dîme* in Stamboul, the Egyptian Minister of Finance can reckon beforehand—barring only the contingency of a bad Nile—within a few purses of what his land revenue for the year will produce. It is indeed nearly as steady a factor as the *impôt foncier* of France. Nor is this all; for while the so-called tithes of Turkey offer no room for increase, the difference between the *miri* and *oushur* in Egypt constitutes a reserve of taxation potentially worth nearly 1,000,000*l.* a year. Even the heavier of these taxes may, therefore, be regarded as moderate, and the lighter be written down as an almost nominal quit-rent, which, remembering that vested rights here mean vested abuses, might be quite equitably trebled. When the Moukabala law shall, seven years hence, have reduced both land-tax and tithe by one-half, the Egyptian cultivator will in fact be relatively the most lightly taxed of his class in or out of Europe. If to this relief were added a settlement of the tax for a term of years, as has been done for our Indian ryots, the two measures together would form such a boon as agriculture in Egypt has not enjoyed since the Pharaohs.

Important, however, as are these anomalies of tenure and rent, they hardly affect Egyptian husbandry more than the third of its four chief incidents—*labour*. For the present area of cultivation this may be said to be fairly sufficient, since manufacturing industry absorbs so few hands that fully nine-tenths of the whole working population are available for field labour. But if, as is quite feasible, more than 2,000,000 feddans* were added

* According to the register made during the reign of Mehemet Ali, there were (and still are) in Upper Egypt 206,358, and in Lower Egypt, 891,641—or in all, 1,097,999—feddans of uncultivated land, besides which there are

by increased irrigation, native labour, as at present mis-economised, would certainly not meet the enlarged demand. The cause and the remedy, however, for such a contingent deficiency are alike obvious. Although legally abolished, the pernicious system of *corvées* still survives for the benefit of the Government on public works, of the Daïra estates, and of some other large domains; so that as often as the mudir requires a levy for whatever purpose, every male member of a family or worker on a private estate may, according to the caprice or the interests of the sheikh-el-beled, be drafted off on a *corvée* for weeks or even months at a time, to the neglect and consequent loss of the crops thus deprived of their labour. The conscription, too, although much less onerous now than during the reign of Mehemet Ali, still forms a tax on the labour resources of the country out of all proportion to its military needs, and the reduction of which to a figure befitting these would be an immense boon to its agricultural industry. At the same time, many thousands of men and cattle are almost as wastefully employed in working a system of irrigation which was probably old before the Pyramids were built. The complete abolition therefore of these drains of forced labour, and the substitution of some cheap pumping machinery for the *sakkia* and the *shadoof*, would set free thew and sinew enough to till every acre of Egyptian soil that can be further reclaimed to the plough. As it is, the Arab fellahs furnish nearly the whole labour supply of the country, the Copts—except in some villages of Upper Egypt—being almost entirely engaged in trade, in small handicrafts, and in the Government offices. Of

also in four of the lower provinces about 1,500,000 feddans of similar land not registered, the whole of which would become cultivable with extended irrigation.

these fellahen, the lowest and much the most numerous class of actual labourers for hire, called *mourabain*, own no land themselves, but work either for daily pay or for a share—usually the fourth—of the produce of a plot of ground belonging to some cultivator, on whose land they have lived from father to son for generations, and who pays the Government taxes. The wages of these people vary in different districts, but when paid in cash average about 6d. a day.

Next come the small proprietors who own from fifty to several hundred feddans, which they cultivate with the aid of the *mourabain* and of their own families, like the small tenant-farmers of Europe. The condition of this section of the population has much improved during the last twenty years, profiting as it has done from the enhanced price and increased production of nearly every staple crop of the country. The estates of the large owners, the wealthier Pashas and Beys, are similarly worked on this mixed system of wage-payment, part in money and part in produce, or by sub-letting small plots of ground at a fixed rental of so many days' field-labour per feddan. In view of the fact that only extended irrigation is needed to greatly increase the area now under tillage, the idea of importing Coolies has been mooted, but the suggestion has not found favour with the Khedive, —for the probable reason that he well knows there are fellahs enough for every agricultural want of the country, if only the heavy tax of *corvées* were put an end to, if the conscription were reduced by at least one-half, and if hand-labour in irrigation were replaced by cheap wind or steam driven machinery. Perforce these reforms will come, and there is therefore no reason to fear that the development of Egyptian husbandry will be ultimately checked for lack of hands.

But even more important than land tenure, rent, or labour is the vital condition of *water-supply*, on which not merely the profit but the very life of Egyptian husbandry depends. Of this the one sole source is the Nile, whose yearly flood, caught and circulated through a thousand channels, fertilises every tilled acre of Egyptian soil between the tropics and the Mediterranean. The annual rise of the river is almost tidal in its periodicity, commencing generally in the last days of June, and attaining its greatest height in the third or fourth week of September, when the gradual fall begins which continues till the summer solstice again comes round.* This annual phenomenon, it need hardly now be said, is attributable to the equatorial rains, occasional variations in the commencement and duration of which are followed by corresponding irregularities in the rise and fall of the great river; but the dates mentioned are those about which, over a long average of years, these latter generally occur. As soon as the first signs of the commencing swell are noted at Khartoum, the news is flashed down to Cairo, and thence preparations are at once made to protect the embankments which now fence in the stream, wherever needed, along its whole course from Assouan to the sea.

* The rise and fall of the river are registered by the Nilometer at the southern end of the little island of Rhoda, opposite Old Cairo. This consists of a square well communicating at bottom with the river, in the centre of which is a graduated pillar divided into sixteen cubits (of two and a half inches each), equal to twenty-four Cairene cubits of fourteen and a quarter inches, and sub-divided into twenty-four digits each. Since this famous measure was erected (A.D. 861), the bed of the river has considerably risen, and the flood at its highest now tops the column by nearly one and two-thirds cubits. From soon after the commencement of the inundation till it has attained its greatest height, the gradual increase as registered by the pillar is proclaimed daily by special criers throughout Cairo. The ceremony of the *Khaleeg*, or cutting of the great canal which here taps the river, takes place when the rise has attained sixteen cubits of the Nilometer, and forms one of the chief Egyptian festivals of the year.