

CHAPTER XVI.

FAUNA AND FLORA.

The Camel—The Ass—The Horse—The Ox—The Buffalo—Sheep and Goats—The Pig, "Unclean" to Christian, Moslem, and Jew—Dogs and Cats—Indigenous Wild Animals—Crocodiles and Hippopotami—Abundant Ornithology—Tame Fowl—Wild Fowl—Ophidians—Fish—Native Trees less numerous than Animals—Palms—Sycamores—Acacias—Tamarisks—Poplars—Cypresses—Mulberries—Olives—Exotics very numerous—Their Varieties.

THE importance of a few of their respective types warrants a brief chapter on the animals and trees now most commonly met with in Egypt.*

Amongst the former, the *camel* ranks first as, next to the date-palm, the most characteristic feature in the whole natural panorama. From the sea to the cataract, this most eastern of animals meets the eye everywhere; stalking with long noiseless stride, cargo-laden, through the narrow streets of Alexandria near the harbour; or inland, yoked singly with buffalo or even donkey to the plough; or yet again higher up, wending their way in solemn file along the high river-bank between Cairo and one or other of the stations at which the great southern caravan routes strike the Nile. The common Egyptian camel is the two-humped Bactrian variety, called by the Arabs *djemmel*, and is much taller and stronger than the

* The reader who cares for exhaustive information on this subject may be referred to the chapters contributed by MM. Coquebert, Savigny, and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire to vols. xix., xxiii., and xxiv. of the *Description de l'Egypte*, and to Captain Shelley's beautiful *Handbook to the Birds of Egypt* (1872).

more graceful *hadjim*, or one-humped dromedary, which is only used to carry single riders on rapid journeys across the desert. The chief breeders of the animal are the Ababdeh Bedoween, who share with the Bisharis the great Eastern wilderness south of Kenneh, and provide cattle for most of the caravans on both sides of the river. These *djemmel* camels usually carry a load of six hundredweight, and, though fed for three-quarters of the year on nothing better than chopped straw and an occasional handful of beans, they are good for eighteen or twenty years' hard work. It is noteworthy that, although the camel was known in Egypt in the time of Abraham, no trace of the animal is found in any of the antique paintings or sculptures. This does not, however, prove that it was even rare in the country, since fowls and pigeons, which abounded from the earliest ages, are equally absent from the monumental records of farmyard stock.

The *ass* is the next most prominent feature in Egyptian animal life. In the field, the constant fellow-worker with the camel, the buffalo, and the ox, he is, out of it, the universal mount of both rich and poor. Between, however, the lordly white or cream-coloured Mecca donkey—as large and powerful as a mule—and his puny, ill-fed, over-worked relative at the other end of the asinine scale, the difference is as great as between the portly Bey or Effendi who ambles past on the one, and the half-naked fellah bestriding the bare back of the other. Their market value, too, is proportionate—the one costing as much as 100% or even 150%, while the other may be bought for nearly as many piastres. The low-caste animals are, of course, far the most numerous; but even of them some fine specimens, ridden by less wealthy owners or plying for hire, may be seen in Alexandria and Cairo, where—

especially since last year's destructive epidemic amongst horses, which both mules and asses escaped—these last now carry three-fourths of the street passenger traffic. The best of these low-caste donkeys are bred in Upper Egypt.

The modern Egyptian *horse*, which is seldom seen out of what may be called the two capitals, is a poor specimen of his race, and suffers from his double competition with the ass and the camel. Within the past few years, however, the Khedive has made successful efforts to improve the breed by crossing it with English blood, and up till the epidemic of last autumn he maintained a fine stud near Cairo, which had already in this way supplied a large number of excellent cavalry mounts. But the mysterious malady swept away nearly the whole, and in little more than three months destroyed, it was estimated, 500,000 worth of horses between the mid-Delta and Upper Egypt. His Highness's own stables, as well as his son's, were almost completely emptied; and for a time Prince Mehemet Tewfik, the heir apparent, might be seen jogging in every morning to his Ministry of the Interior astride an ambling *hemâr*. Barley and clover being indispensable to the Egyptian horse, the dearness of his keep precludes his employment for agricultural work; and except, therefore, for the better class animals which are fit for saddle or carriage use, the price ranges little higher than for a good (common) donkey or mule. This latter itself is in great local request, and shares with the high-class Hedjaz donkey the honour of mounting the wealthier old-fashioned grandees.

The once divine *ox* has sadly degenerated since a single specimen of his kind sufficed to fill one of the huge sarcophagi that excite the wonder of the visitor to the Apis mausoleum. Hard work and bad food, however,

sufficiently account for this decadence; and now, never pampered nor rose-wreathed, except when a French butcher in Cairo stall-feeds and bedecks a single victim for the sacrifice of *mardi-gras*, he toils three-fourths of the year at the plough or the water-wheel, and ends an unhonoured life by turning into such beef as is seldom met with out of Egypt. It is but fair to add that most of the present stock is not indigenous, but descends from the large importation from Turkey and Bessarabia which followed the desolating murrain of 1863-4.

The *buffalo* of the Delta and Nile Valley, though hardier and heavier than its bovine relative, has few features in common with its huge wild namesake of the American prairies. It is almost hairless, of a dark slate colour, and with its low-humped back, reflexed horns, and savage-looking face, is the ugliest, yet in reality one of the gentlest, of Egyptian animals. Its milk, besides being largely used fresh, also supplies most of the sour cream (*yâourt*) that forms a common article of fellah diet, and in the absence of wheel-carriages, its chief work, like the ox, is at the plough or the *sakkia*.

As *sheep* and *goats* herd together, and differ but little in size, colour, and coat, they may be here conjointly mentioned. Both are very prolific, the gross total of a year's lambs and kids exceeding 800,000—the sheep especially lambing twice in the twelvemonth, with usually two at a birth. Of these latter the breeds differ, according as the rams were from Barbary, the Sennaar, or the Hedjaz. The first of these three varieties is the most numerous, and is of the mouflon type, with a heavy fat tail, a long bushy chin-tuft, and a thick but coarse oily fleece of wool. Their horns are large, with a triangular base, and rounded angles terminating in a sharp point. The goat abounds most in the Delta, where the commonest breed

is of Syrian origin. The type of the animal in Upper Egypt is smaller, with an abundant fleece of long silky hair, resembling that of the Angora goat. In both sections these animals supply the greater part of the milk and butter used in the country; the former is good, but of the latter, as made by fellah dairy-women, the less said the better. As the food of both animals is the same—the weeds and dry acrid plants on the edge of the desert—the flesh of both has the same rather sour flavour, but is still superior to that of the Syrian sheep, which is largely imported and sells at a lower price.

The *pig* in Egypt is as “unclean” to all delicate-stomached Christians as to the Moslem or the Jew. It divides with the dog and the kite the scavenging of the towns, and what even the *kelb* refuses as too filthy to be eaten, the *khanzir* ravenously devours. In this respect 3,500 years—when, in the 18th dynasty, the animal first appears in the sculptures—have but little improved either its habits or its local repute as an article of food. “As well,” says a recent writer, “might you dine on a rat taken from a sewer, or a vulture caught in the ribbed cavity of a camel it was busy in eviscerating. It were all one to sup with the ghools.” No chemistry of nature can, in fact, transmute the filth on which the Egyptian pig generally feeds into fit nutriment for man; and even the least nice of foreign tourists, therefore, will do well to avoid pork at a Cairene *table d’hôte*. It is chiefly killed and offered for sale by Greek butchers, whose co-religionists do not so generally share the prejudice which the Copts feel quite as strongly as either Arabs or Jews to the flesh of this animal.

The *dog* completes the list of the larger domesticated animals of Egypt, where, as throughout the East, he is also regarded as unclean, though in a much less degree

than the swine. In Alexandria and Cairo, as in Stamboul, these animals segregate themselves into sets belonging to each “quarter,” and woe betide the cur of one *toum* who adventures into another. A similar geographical antipathy divides the town dog from his country fellow, who, nearly as savage as the wolf or the jackal, hovers in packs on the borders of the desert, and lives mainly by nightly forays on stray cattle, or anything that can be picked up round the villages. The two sects strictly respect each other’s boundaries, or, if an individual does not, he pays the penalty of his skin, or even his life, for the trespass. As a rule, European dogs do not thrive in Egypt; but where they do become acclimatised a bull-terrier, or even a pointer, scatters these native pariahs from his path almost as easily as Gulliver might have cleared his way in Lilliput. There is, however, a race of large rough-haired dogs near Thebes, who are celebrated for their fierceness and courage.

The domestic *cat*, anciently sacred to Pasht, is still treated with especial kindness in Egypt, but the hospitals founded by Moslem piety for its care when sick or destitute have fared even worse than most other charitable foundations, and the garden or court-yard of the Cadi’s house is now, as it was forty years ago, when Mr. Lane described this kindly trait of Egyptian character, their only legitimate refuge.

The indigenous wild animals of a country which offers so little cover and feeding-ground as Egypt may be counted almost on the fingers of one hand. The crocodile is now seldom seen below Girzheh, more than 300 miles above Cairo, and the hippopotami still move rarely below the Fourth Cataract; while on land, the hyena, the jackal, the fox, and (on the borders of the desert) the gazelle, are the chief mammals worth mentioning. Of