

A TRIP TO LUXOR.

"No one has really seen Egypt who has not been to Luxor." Such an opinion coming from one who knew Egypt well aroused a strong desire to visit, if possible, this Mecca of Egyptologists. The opportunity came early in April, and I found myself, with two companions, a passenger by the night express from Cairo, on its long 450 mile journey southward to the site of ancient Thebes, "the city of a hundred gates," as Homer tells us. The line skirts the west bank of the Nile for about 350 miles, and then crosses the great river by a fine bridge, and thereafter follows the eastern side to Luxor and Assuan. Upper Egypt, as we saw it from the train till arrival at our destination, was a revelation to us. The Nile Valley, lying between the barren, reddish coloured, sun scorched Arabian and Libyan Ranges, varies in width from 5 to possibly 20 miles, and from one side to the other it is the scene of intensive cultivation, and carries a large population of seemingly contented and prosperous fellaheen. From the train windows there was a kaleidoscopic view of splendid crops of various grains (chiefly wheat, barley, and dhurra—maize) being reaped, threshed and winnowed by methods as primitive as those of biblical times—of canals running in every direction, and revealing on the river banks the enormous thickness of the rich black soil brought down through countless ages by the Nile—groves of waving date and dun palms—scores of the familiar Arab mud villages—slender and graceful mosque minarets—ungainly camels and patient donkeys—men, women and children wending their way to the fields in the grey morning light; and presently, the great Orb of Ra, the Sun god, lifting his golden rim over the Arabian Mountains.

Luxor was reached at 9.30 a.m. and after a hurried breakfast at our hotel on the bank of the Nile, we sallied forth to view the nearest ruin—the Temple of Luxor. This great temple, erected about 1,500 B.C., and in its day the most beauti-

ful temple in Egypt, yet suffers by comparison with its greater neighbour of Karnak, a mile away, with which it was originally connected by an avenue of sphinxes. It has also been damaged by the earthquake of 27 B.C., the marks of which are seen all over the Theban ruins, and by the hands of the Coptic and Persian vandals. Nevertheless, as it is generally the first ruin visited, its magnificent proportions (500 by 180 feet), its 14 huge central Lotus columns (51 feet high and 11 feet in diameter), its bas-reliefs of the time of Rameses II, and its massive though mutilated statues of the same great monarch, as well as the shrine at one end added by Alexander the Great, still leave a peculiarly vivid impression on the mind.

But Luxor is as nothing compared to Karnak, where we spent the whole afternoon, amid the grandest ruins of their kind to be seen in the World, in examining which many afternoons might be profitably spent. For 2000 years at least Karnak would seem to have been the holiest ground in Egypt and the greatest monarchs of the palmiest days of Egyptian history vied with each other in the erection of temples and colonnades, obelisks and statues, and in the carving of bas-reliefs, which for number, variety, beauty and all that constitutes architectural and artistic excellence are unequalled, not only among Egyptian monuments, but among those of all other nations. Chief among the ruins, probably, is the wonderfully pillared hall of Seti I. (1370 B.C.), the most splendid single chamber that has ever been built by any architect, and even in its ruins one of the grandest sights the world contains. With its floor area of 88,000 square feet (larger than any cathedral, except St. Peter's at Rome) its 164 massive stone columns, each carved out of a single block and the largest of which are 66 feet high and can be just spanned by seven men with outstretched arms, its roof of solid blocks of granite, and all coloured with painted bas-reliefs and hieroglyphics, it may well be imagined that the whole building was the most magnificent on which the eye of man has ever rested. A like magnificence of construction and of execution marks the other portions of

this enormous temple built by Queen Hat-shepset (the Queen Elizabeth of Egyptian history), Rameses II. and III and Thothmes I., II. and III.

Our second day was spent on the western side of the river, here some 500 yards wide. Crossing early in the morning we bestrode our donkeys (yclept "Jim Corbett," "Rameses," and "Whiskey and Soda"), and rode over the site of ancient Thebes westward for perhaps three miles. Entering a valley in the Libyan Range, which bounds the Theban plain on the west, we rode into the heart of the hills, and reached a natural amphitheatre partly choked with sand and debris from the surrounding heights. In this natural basin are the marvellous tombs, tunnelled for hundreds of feet into the solid rock, of some of the greatest kings of Egypt, who reigned during the most flourishing period of its history, between 1700 B.C. and 1000 B.C. Out of quite 40 of these tombs we examined two, those of the Great Seti I and of Amenophis II. They are really like gorgeous underground palaces, containing a succession of passages, corridors, and pillared halls, and all covered with an infinite variety of the most brilliant paintings, the colour of which is as fresh as though the workmanship were but of yesterday, all expressing the idea of conducting the King to the World of Death. "The further you advance into the tomb the deeper you become involved in endless processions of jackal and monkey headed gods, everlasting convolutions of serpents, monstrous forms of genii—good and evil, sacred lakes and barges, till at the very end of all you arrive at the vaulted hall, where lies the immense marble sarcophagus, which ought to (but rarely does) contain the body of the King." In Amenophis's tomb, however, we saw the royal mummy—a strong face—also those of his queen, a daughter, and a female servant—an impressive if somewhat gruesome sight. The queen's dark brown hair presented an almost uncanny appearance of freshness as it hung in wavy masses over her shoulders. Many of the royal sarcophagi and mummies have been removed to different museums, especially that in Cairo. We would strongly advise those intending to see Luxor to arrange before-

hand for the electric light to be turned on in the tombs—this can be done for a comparatively small cost. Leaving the valley we climbed to a neighbouring eminence, and enjoyed a remarkable panoramic view of the Valley of the Nile and the site of Thebes—an ideal one for a great city. Thence down a steep mountain path to the Theban plain again to see the temple of Egypt's only great queen, Hat-shepset, remarkable, not only for its magnificent situation and architectural proportions, but especially because its bas-reliefs contain the earliest human record we have of a naval expedition—that of five Egyptian ships to the land of Punt, probably part of Somaliland. Every detail of the expedition is pictured with astonishing faithfulness, and it forms a record of fascinating interest to the sight-seer.

The chief remaining "lion" of Luxor was the twin Colossi of Amenophis III. standing well out on the plain, each 60 feet high, and originally of one solid block of sandstone. We think a statue vast, of magnificent dimensions, if it be 20 or 30 feet high, but we were now face to face with mighty sculptures that originally were probably nearly 70 feet in height. One American writer thus speaks of them—"The impression of sublime and tranquil magnificence which they convey from a distance is confirmed by a nearer approach. There this gigantic pair sit, keeping watch, hands on knees, gazing straight forward across the old river towards the sunrise, seeming, although so much of the faces is worn away, to be looking across to the monumental piles of Karnak and Luxor, which became gorgeous temples after these throne seats were placed here—the most immovable thrones that have ever been established on this earth."

Many days might be spent in Luxor, for everything is on so vast a scale that it requires time for the meaning of it all to soak into the mind. But even if only a few days can be spared, none should leave the land of the Pharaohs without seeing, if possible, these remains of one of the oldest and most remarkable civilisations this earth has produced.

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