

## IN THE WAKE OF THE RISING SUN.

(By 'VIATOR')

Beyrout, Syria, December 6, 1900.

After a visit to the Mens House Hotel, rich in every modern luxury, we came back with the evening to Cairo. Along the road the dusky fellahs moved in picturesque groups, and stately camels with jingling bells and modest donkeys with their riders were silhouetted against the setting sun, reflecting in these novel groups the imagery and quaintness and unchangeableness of the East. On either side of the acacia trees, that flanked the roadway, the low, green level stretched for miles, picked out here and there with patches of reedy marsh, or shallow lagoons, or harrowed out soil—all empurpled in the rich sunset. From the fields of rice and maize and sugar came the 'furrowed ox in loose traces' and the little and scantily-clad fellahs and the inevitable donkeys. Along the road were blue-clad women coming from the spring with stone water-jars poised daintily on their heads, others with tiny mahogany babies sitting astride on their shoulders or over the hips—cavaliers on restless steeds, Bedouins with long strings of camels, donkey-boys following up their patient charges, all flashed in clear and novel vignette in the last beams of the lowering sun. To Cairo we jog easily behind our wiry ponies past motley crowds of street vendors and professional beggars looking for bakshish, through the lighted streets, along the narrow bazaars whose shops in their far recesses are gay with curios and colored glass and brass coffee-pots shining and simmering, past groups of men placidly smoking the nargillehs or singing to Allah and reading passages from the Koran sublimely indifferent to other mortals who, in their untutored simplicity, marvel at the wonders unfolded in the new conditions of life in the Orient—conditions that change not with the new order, that are deep set in the impregnable traditions of a long and chequered past. Cairo, as we drove to Shepheard's, gleamed around us in white and yellow houses and domes and nodding palms like a fairy city, while the long lines of the Mokattan Hills stood out as sturdy sentinels over the busy farms.

We were taken to visit the Citadel on a lofty hill whence an idea may be formed of the magnitude and population of Cairo, and whence a commanding view is had of the spreading city, the surrounding country, the minarets and domes beneath and in the distance the encircling Mokattan Hills. Here is the scene of the murder of the Mamalukes, the Egyptian Janissaries, by Mahomet Ali in 1811, and here, too, is shown the place whence Emin Bey, to avoid the murderers, leaped his horse over the parapet, killing indeed his steed, but escaping, so says the tradition, without personal injury. Alas! for the weakness of human faith. The leap is some 30 feet from parapet to ground, and so we listen and pass on and dim the romance by writing it down as a myth. We visited here the mosque of Mahomet Ali, glittering in alabaster columns, and showing wondrous colors through the many-colored windows in the walls and clerestory. We asked our dragoman, the gentle Sadi Oman, if he, too, would like to join the worshippers. With a broad smile from ear to ear he was at his oblations in the twinkling of an eye, doffed his mantle and shoes, and was at his prostrations with as keen a devotion as the others. We were given full-sized sandals to wear over our shoes, and thus equipped made the tour of the mosque. Countless small glass lamps were hanging from cut-glass and brazen chandeliers all over the building to within a few feet of the floor, and all around on carpets, fronting niches pointing to Mecca, swarthy, stolid Moslems were on their knees praying to Allah, anon prostrating head to earth in the earnestness of their devotions. So have we seen them on steamers, in the streets, in the depths of the country, in the crowded bazaars, nothing recking of the observer, paying their vows according to their creed, and after the manner of the Koran adoring the Most High. And when towards sundown, as often in the day, the muezzin from the minaret top calls in shrill monotonous tones to prayer, we have seen the pious followers of the Prophet seek a coigne of vantage and, indifferent of things of earth, sing the praises of Allah, and prostrate in prayer. Strong, unshakable in their convictions and customs, they erect to human eyes an impregnable bulwark to the Christian message.

## HELIOPOLIS.

It was a pleasant drive, if hot, to the 'City of the Sun,' some six miles from Cairo. To mark the site of the ancient capital, at one time second only to Memphis, there remains but one monument, the famous obelisk in rose granite of Assarian, covered with hieroglyphics. It is the oldest obelisk in Egypt, yet it remains erect *in situ*. Its neighbour and companion during thousands of years was 'Cleopatra's Needle,' now decorating the Thames Embankment. Here stood the 'City of the Sun,' and from this city went forth in the ages a colony of priests to found the great Syrian city of Baalbec, of which we shall have in time to speak. We looked at the column standing all alone and mused at the ravages of time. As we mused and gazed in reverie we were surrounded by a crowd of peasant children, lithe, bronze, quarter-clad, asking for the inevitable bakshish—but degenerate in blood, and aim, and purpose, fallen from high state, and beneath the juggernaut car of felonious landlordism, dragging out an existence in national thraldom in the questionable interests of those who govern them. Poor fallen fellahs of Egypt. Their lot it is

'To scorn delights and live laborious days.'

But they know not of aim or aspiration or freedom.

'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise,  
That last infirmity of noble mind.'

They know not of the aspirations and claims and rights of manhood or nationhood. They know as little of the pulsations of the world, of the Boer War, the Chinese Boxers, the New Zealand penny post as the dull ass and ox and camel they drive in the furrows. So

have the mighty fallen in Egypt, for their relics tell in the face of the nations that the land produced great men and able in the brave days of old.

'The earth hath bubbles as the water hath  
And these are of them.'

So it is written that

'Troy was.'

## THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S TREE.

Not far from 'The City of the Sun,' on the road back to Cairo, is the village of Matarieh where, tradition records, the Holy Family rested after their flight into Egypt. 'The Blessed Virgin's Tree' and the Blessed Virgin's Well' mark the place of resting. An avenue rich in orange, palm, and banana trees leads from the high road to the 'Garden of Balm' where stands the aged sycamore, venerated for ages for the 'Blessed Virgin's Tree.' To the left is a rustic water-wheel used in pumping up the water from the 'miraculous spring.' Harnessed to the shaft was a bullock, blind-folded; and round and round he plodded his weary way the while crystal water flowed into watercourse and cistern. The most celebrated of all the souvenirs at Matarieh is its spring or well. The Mussulmans have at all times venerated this spring as being endowed with marvellous virtues. Tradition adds that the washing of the Child Jesus in the waters of Matarieh miraculously imparted to them extraordinary sweetness and purity. The water of Matarieh is in fact so good, especially that in the Garden of Balm, that formerly the Paschas of Cairo had it brought for their use at table, whilst everywhere else around the water raised by the *sakghs* or water-mills a short distance from the river has a distinctly saline or brackish taste. The existence indeed of a spring, distant from the infiltrations of the Nile, in a soil formed by alluvial deposit, and far removed from hills, in a county too like this where the rainfall scarcely moistens the highways eight or nine times a year, is in itself a phenomenon sufficiently extraordinary.

The 'Virgin's Tree' at Matarieh stands about 50 yards to the east of the spring. Tradition tells that on leaving Heliopolis the Divine exiles made their way to the sycamore which is now named the 'Tree of Matarieh,' and that being pursued by malefactors the trunk of the tree opened of itself and offered them a safe refuge from attack. The 'Virgin's Tree' is a sycamore—a true sycamore of the East; but in no wise resembling the species of maple called sycamore which grows in Western countries. It is enclosed by railings, but we managed, by judicious expenditure of bakshish to secure some of the leaves. Such trees are met in Syria and Palestine. Sycamore trees are associated with Zachaeus, who wished to see Our Lord pass, and with Judas, who hanged himself on one near the gates of Jerusalem. The 'Virgin's Tree' bears marks of age no one contends that it is the same tree that sheltered the Holy Family. The present tree, as far as I could learn from the Jesuit Fathers close by, dates back some 300 years, but it may be an offshoot from the original stock, the roots of which did not perish with the tree itself. Our veneration extends more to the spot than to the tree. The Virgin's sycamore is for us a sign, a memento of a touching scene, but it is not a relic. In thought we were borne back through the ages to the days when the Son of God fled from mortal attack, and we blessed Providence that we were able to kiss the ground where trod the footsteps of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Close at hand the Jesuit Fathers have a house of studies and an oratory to the Blessed Virgin, and here it was, under the fierce gleams of an Egyptian sun, we first met our countryman, Rev. Patrick Kane, S.J.—kind, genial courteous, and helpful. Before leaving we took a farewell glance from the top of the enclosure at the rich plains of Heliopolis—the sight of departed greatness—'Magni nominis umbra'—the scene, too, in more recent times of a great feat of arms by the French troops under Kleber. Here it was on the 20th March, 1800, that Kleber with 10,000 soldiers defeated a mighty army of 80,000 Moslems. The battle raged around Heliopolis and Matarieh. When victory declared for the French army, Kleber, it is said, went to Matarieh and with his sword engraved his name on the 'Virgin's Tree.'

## THE CRYPT OF THE HOLY FAMILY.

On the eastern bank of the Nile, facing the pyramids of Ghizeh, and ancient Memphis, and about 3 miles from the European quarter of the capital, extend dwelling houses, gardens, old convents, markets and ruins for over a league in length, the whole forming a suburb to the great city, and called Old Cairo. Here, according to a very ancient tradition, the Holy Family stopped for a time on their journey into Egypt. Over the spot, thus sanctified by the Divine exiles' presence, stands an ancient crypt bearing testimony to the venerable tradition. It is called Kasr-esh-Shamaah. The door is dug out like a hole in the huge Roman wall at the foot of an actual pit six feet lower than the roadway. There is no shop here, no sound of work, not a step to be heard nor a voice. All is silent as the tomb. All those around are Christians, but either Copt or Greek schismatics. Here was the Coptic Church of St. Sergius built over the spot where the Holy Family are said to have made their resting place. Here in early days was a church built, it is said, by St. Helena. But in the seventeenth century the Catholics were driven out by Coptic schismatics, and at the present day no Catholic worship is publicly allowed in the crypt. This little history, it may be said, is purely legendary.

'I cannot tell how the truth may be  
I tell the tale as it was told to me.'

My authority for most of the details in regard to the stopping places of the Holy family in Egypt is the Rev. P. M. Julien, S.J., of the College of Fagollah, Cairo.

While in Cairo we frequently saw the Khedive with turboush or crimson fez on head, driving in open carriage amongst his crowds of motley subjects, enclosed front, rear, and flank by platoons of mounted soldiery.