



RÂS ARÂKAH.

Râs is the same as our “nase” or “naze.” This bold promontory south of Suez, running out from Jebel Atâkah, on the western shore of the Red Sea, comes into every view of Suez.

SINAI.

SUEZ itself has no history, but it occupies one of the finest sites in the world. Up to it—not as an affair of yesterday, but always—must have come the sea-borne commerce and the enterprise of Asia, seeking fresh outlets. As to-day there is a tide of people passing by it on the way to India, China, and the newest countries of the newest continent, Australasia, so we may with reason suppose that the primitive peoples of the world sailed up the Red Sea in their rude ships, ever lured on with the idea that there must be some “happy islands” or some “land of the gods” beyond those glowing waters. To such the golden sands of Suez presented the first impassable barrier, and in the still air might the thoughts have had birth—

“Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more!”

There are no ancient buildings and certainly no modern buildings worth looking at in Suez. The Canal, the big ships, and all that pertain to them, these are the only things that one would care to see, and, perhaps, to watch the bustling ease with which the mails are

shipped from the train to the P. and O. steamer on their voyage to India, &c. Except to a novice the bazaars are not comparable with those of Cairo or Damascus or many other smaller cities. In them, beyond the wonderful and facetious donkey boys, one sees the nationalities of both sides of the Red Sea (Arabs, Nubians, Egyptians, Syrians, &c.) mingled with Greeks and Europeans of all sorts. One looks at piles of native silks and embroideries, there are carpets from Yeddah, stones and pebbles and beads brought by pilgrims from Mecca, and plenty of stores such as occur in every port which sailors or travellers frequent.

Still for the traveller who has rushed across Europe, the Mediterranean, and Lower Egypt in eight or nine days, or for him who slowly for two days past has been steaming down the "long ditch" called "The Canal," there is this interest in Suez: Here two worlds meet! Neither the Railway, nor the Canal, nor the Port, nor the Post Office, nor the Steamship Offices, nor the first-rate Hotel, nor the workshops full of all manner of mechanical contrivances suited for the repair of the sea-monsters in which modern civilisation delights, have altered the real town or changed its people. Suez is sunny, whitewashed, flat-roofed, narrow, inconvenient, and stocked with evil smells, although you may have to get out of the way of a locomotive every now and then, and though its harbour and roadstead be gay with the shipping of all nations. I say advisedly "of all nations," for just as we were in anxious hope yesterday of getting through to Suez before nightfall, we had to go into a "siding" to let seven large vessels pass us, and amongst others a Chinese merchantman manned and commanded by self-satisfied Celestials.

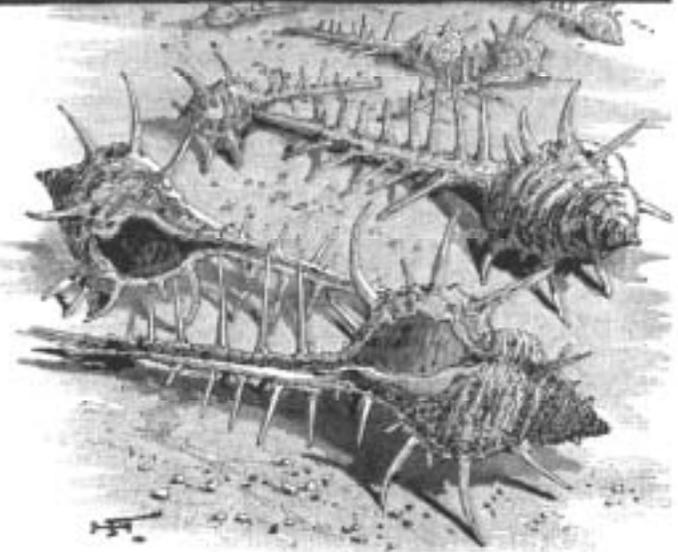
During our detention, battered by the pitiless chaff of the Suez donkey boys, who had swarmed down in order to induce some of us to make an excursion by land to Suez, instead of fretting our souls out against the bulwarks of our floating but not moving prison, one had ample time to examine the position of Suez. The blue bay is bounded by the weary grassless desert which ever shimmers and glistens in the almost rainless atmosphere. The town stands out on the right, with its tall minaret, from a forest of masts and yards of native boats, overhung by the massive purple form of Jebel Atâkah (see pages 1, 3); while to the left there is a long vista—beyond the nearer ridges of the desert—of broken lighter-coloured mountains, the outlying portion of the Sinaitic range.

One may feel impatient, or one may have worn off one's impatience in the Canal. The regulations of the Canal Company about passing ships, doubtless most wise and necessary, and about anchoring or mooring at sunset, cause a great deal of irritation to arise in one's suffering temper. It is so hot; the Canal banks are so uninteresting and monotonous; flamingoes and pelicans have become such common objects; the mirage even has worn itself out; while a stray Arab on his camel causes no excitement whatever. Yet how can one be impatient! Surely we are on classic ground! Let us try for a minute or two to keep under this impatience, to shut one's ears to the nonsense of the donkey boys, who have given to each donkey a new name suited to the stirring politics of the day at home and abroad, or even to the more domestic events with which for months past we have been feasted

by the Daily Press—and to meditate. And what will be the subject of our meditations! Surely none other than that which amused us and interested us and kept us quiet long ago, when we looked at the pictures in the big Bible at home—“the passage of Israel through the Red Sea.” Many and many have been the suggestions made, and often has the solution seemed to be within reach, when it has vanished away, like the Indian’s “Snow Maiden.” The theory of Herr Brugsch, the able Egyptologist, set forth before the International Congress of Orientalists at London in 1874, proves conclusively that the modern Sîn,



near Lake Menzaleh, and distant about eighty-five miles north-west from Suez, is the Pi-Ramessu or Raamses of the Bible (built as a temple city by Ramses II.), and that it almost occupies the ground of the ancient Zor, or Zoan. This city was the royal city of Ramses II. and of many of his successors, as in years gone by it had been the capital of those hated Hyksos kings, during whose time Joseph was sold into Egypt. From this city started the military roads which led, by “the way of the Philistines,” to Phœnicia and the Hittite empire, and so on to the Euphrates—or through the Negeb to Edom and Moab. From a “papyrus,” which seems to be the detailed report of a subordinate to his superior of the pursuit of two fugitives who had escaped into the marches of the frontier land east of the Delta, the imagination of the learned German conjures up for us the probable route of the Israelites, placing “Baalzephon” at “Mount Casius,” on the shore of “The Sea” (the Mediterranean). This is the extreme northern route proposed. There is another route, which, taking Memphis as the royal city of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, makes the Israelites journey on from the Land of Goshen till they reach the Red Sea at the foot of Jebel Atâkah. Two reasons, however,



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are to be urged against a passage at this spot; the width of the gulf, which would have required the lapse of hours and hours in order to traverse it, and the depth of the waters—for there would have been on either side the strange roadway, along the bed of the sea, a *mountain* rather than a *wall* of water, sixty or seventy feet high. But between these extreme points of conjecture there are several spots which a combination of circumstances make likely—such as (1) the ford across the attenuated arm of the Red Sea which runs up behind Suez (what vestiges remain of the ancient Kholzum, the ancestor of Suez, are close to this arm of the sea, and an island hereabouts is known as Jews' Island); or (2), better still, a spot near the "Crocodile Lake" (Lake Timsâh) and Ismailia, famous in modern story.

Let us leave now the happy land of conjectures, take this Arab dhow, which has been cleaned up at our dragoman's order, and with baggage piled round us sail across the head of the gulf and get on to 'Ayún Músa, where camels and encampment are to wait for us. We shall have a good deal of trouble with the Quarantine authorities, for there is a strong military cordon drawn round 'Ayún Músa this autumn (1881) in order to stop the expected return of pilgrims from Mecca, where the plague or cholera is said to have broken out; so we must not be too sanguine as to reaching "the Wells" before sunset. Very lovely was the day when I made such a start. But the anticipations which force themselves on one block out of sight the clear air, the brightness of the sunshine, the deep but various blue of sky and sea. One has reached the desert and is going to lead a desert life, one has said good-bye to the restraints of civilisation and has become enfranchised; the bondage of the Egypt of the nineteenth-century world is broken, at least for a time. 'Ayún Músa, or "Wells of Moses," is a beautiful oasis in the desert, one hour's walk from the Red Sea and the new Quarantine ground, and, I should think, eight or nine miles from the town of Suez. There are several springs of clear but brackish water, sheltered by groups of fine tamarisk-trees and knotted palms, and surrounded by well-kept diligently tilled gardens stocked with lettuces, radishes, &c. There is one pool which is built round with ancient masonry. Summer-houses or Greek cafés (which can furnish sleeping accommodation), and the boisterous habits of its visitors, may justify the unhappy claim of this desert oasis to be the "Richmond" of Suez. One can turn one's back, however, on all this, and have the tent pitched near the solitary palm, beside the lonely, dark-coloured, brackish, scanty pool, on that sand hillock which lies away from the oasis proper. Here the real "genius loci" will meet one, and will whisper that after the Red Sea this was the first encampment, and that here Miriam taught the women of Israel "The Song of Triumph." (Exodus xv. 20, 21.) But here too henceforth there will arise a sadder memory; for from this spot (where, as himself tells us, he who had for years been familiar with the literature of Arabia, and had read with a certain vague interest the descriptions of desert life, had had in 1868 at last all its reality brought before him) there set forth in the August of this year (1882) on a chivalrous expedition, viz. to wean the affections of the Bedawín from the rebel Arabi, Professor Palmer with Captain Gill, R. E., and Lieutenant Charrington, R.N. Solitude is a true companion in such a place. One strolls towards the sea over the uneven space

of wind-tossed sand mounds, which form the entire landscape (see page 11). What marvellous shells!—the shells one has so often looked at in London fancy shops mounted as flower vases! What strange waifs and strays of sea and desert life! The lights are beginning to show in the mighty ships which are lying in the Suez anchorage, and there is a faintness of distinctness about the white buildings and the minaret which mark out the town itself (see page 10), lying at the feet of the purple mountain out of which the glow of sunset has just faded. That is Africa, and of that mysterious continent the strip of land—the valley with its mighty river—behind those mountains is the greatest marvel. Now let us turn and watch the stars, which seem so much larger and brighter than they are in the English sky, come out, from our encampment under the tall, ragged, weather-beaten palm-tree, which may have stood as a sentry looking over the thirsty desert, stretched across the whole base of the triangle of the Sinaitic peninsula, for countless ages.

The loneliness is very intense. Yet there is an intermittent murmur of laughter and merriment from the group of Arabs round the encampment fire, which begins to shoot forth a cheerful light on the white canvas of our two small English tents. And who are these Arabs? and why should one be obliged to have their company, or at any rate the company of any except those to whom the camels belong and who act as camel-men? The track is not hard to find, and the watering places are well known. These Arabs are the *ghufará*, or protectors, without whose escort the traveller would not be safe in the Peninsula or in the Desert. They belong to the tribes which have the legitimate right to give protection to the Convent and to travellers. The country under their protection is accurately defined and recognised by other Bedawín; and while under their care and within the limits of their protectorate one is safe. The name of the tribe occupying the Sinaitic peninsula is Towarah (sing. *Túrí*), from “Tor,” the seaport on the south-west of the peninsula, with which word is connected the old Arab term for the peninsula. The Towarah are divided into several tribes, the most despised of which is the Jibalíyeh, whom we shall find at the Convent acting as servants, porters, agricultural labourers, &c. There is a chapter in Professor Palmer’s “Desert of the Exodus” (chap. v.) which gives a capital description of them, etched in with the gentlest, most sympathizing, but most masterly hand. He points out that the prevalent idea of the nomade character of the Arabs is incorrect; no people wander less, and no people (the eager desire one’s Arabs display to reach home, when home is near, is the best evidence of this) are more attached to their native homes. So difficult to find in European languages, in Arabic we find a word corresponding with our “home,” viz. *watan*. They have, though innocent of many built villages and towns, summer and winter camping grounds, and make at the proper season a regular exodus from one to the other. The Arab has no history, because there is no nationality; and so one does not meet with any annals breathing of heroism and chivalry such as Scotland can produce. There is some clanship between the members of a tribe, and the fierce laws of blood-feud keep this up; but there is nothing more.

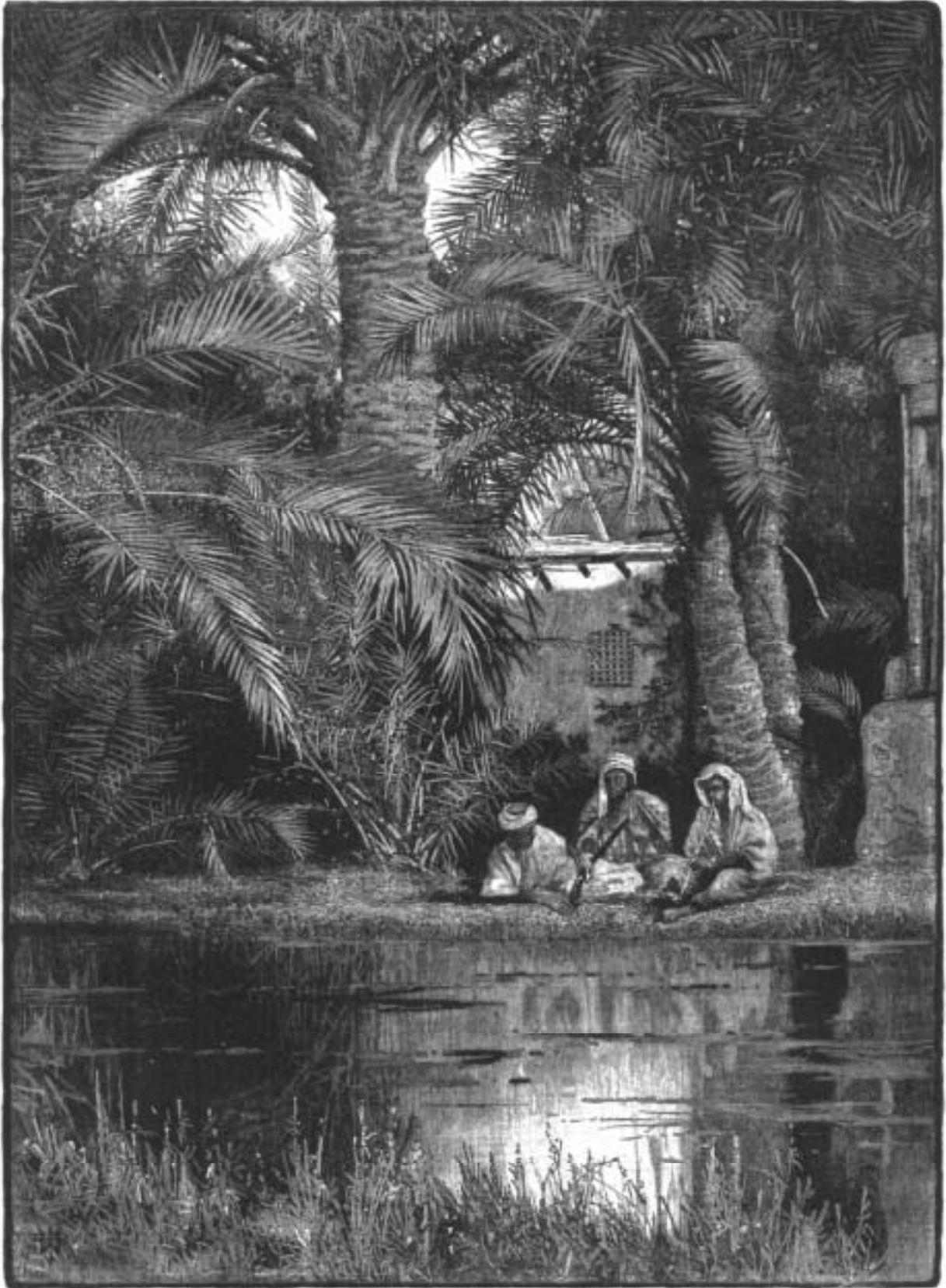
In frame and physique the Arab generally is a fine model. His step is elastic and his carriage marvellously upright. In running or climbing he would be a formidable competitor in our ordinary village games. On his simple food (so simple that beyond the coffee and great round unleavened cakes one does not know of what it consists) he thrives, and his white teeth, shining out between his smiling lips, remind one that to one ill at least of high civilisation he is not heir, and that dentists would be *nowhere* in the Desert. Very charming is the sound of Arab laughter, and, though one does not understand a word of it, the never-ending song, which seems capable of any amount of "gag," and not to be injured by constant interludes, does not really weary any one. Their demeanour is noticeably courteous, whether one observes the threefold salutation (by placing the right hand on the heart, the lips, the forehead or turban) with which they greet one another ordinarily, or such a salutation as took place between an old Arab who came up to our sheikh just now—he saluted him, embraced him, kissed him on either cheek, and then the two, with right hands clasped, said again and again, "Are you well?"—"Thank God, well!"—as Moses said probably to Aaron on the Mount of Salutation (Exodus iv. 27) or to Jethro in the wilderness (Exodus xviii. 7).

When they dispute, which is not infrequently in the day, and especially on the subject of adjusting the loads on the camels each morning, or on the question of agreeing to terms or apportioning the money, they are as violent, demonstrative, and abusive as the frequenters of Billingsgate. In the bargaining the Arab will lie right and left and overreach you; but, the bargain being made, his word is his bond.

The Arab woman does all the home work, and the unmarried girls tend the flocks and herds of an encampment and take them to pasture. Such occupation is derogatory for men. Here, therefore, we may note a relic of that contemptuous regard which was had for the flock-tender among the Israelites. David the shepherd boy, away from his home when Samuel goes down to Bethlehem to visit Jesse, is of no account among his brethren, as being employed in mere girl's work.

The religion of the Bedawín has yet to be explored. Very few, when travelling, are regular in their devotions. There is a strange superstitious awe which certain spots and tombs evoke, and constantly there will come to the surface little evidences of a deep religious feeling. For instance, I and my dragoman met with a bad accident one day. The next morning, when I went to pay my respects to our sheikh, he said, congratulating us, "You are now two days old." Our rescue from imminent peril was regarded by him as a new lease of life by Allah's will. Then one day I had to make a fresh agreement with my Arabs, having changed my route; they sealed, as it were, their promise to conduct me in safety by another way, by solemnly repeating the Fâti'hât (the first chapter in the Koran).

I have said nothing about the dress of the Bedawín of Sinai; nor have I pointed out our sheikh, that is, the petty chief who commands our Arabs, and who is responsible for our safe conduct. There he sits almost undistinguishable, no staff or sword of office. He does more work, I think, than the others, and the others seem to get more angry with him than with any



UNDER THE PALMS, 'AYÚN MÚSA.

“It is a strange spot—this plot of tamarisks” (and palms) “with its seventeen wells—literally an island in the Desert, and now used as the Richmond of Suez—a comparison which chiefly serves to show what a place Suez itself must be!”—(STANLEY.)