

# JACOB ABBOTT

HISTORY OF CLEOPATRA,  
QUEEN OF EGYPT

**Jacob Abbott**  
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**Queen of Egypt**

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*History of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt:*

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# History of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt

## PREFACE

In selecting the subjects for the successive volumes of this series, it has been the object of the author to look for the names of those great personages whose histories constitute useful, and not merely entertaining, knowledge. There are certain names which are familiar, as names, to all mankind; and every person who seeks for any degree of mental cultivation, feels desirous of informing himself of the leading outlines of their history, that he may know, in brief, what it was in their characters or their doings which has given them so widely-extended a fame. This knowledge, which it seems incumbent on every one to obtain in respect to such personages as Hannibal, Alexander, Cæsar, Cleopatra, Darius, Xerxes, Alfred, William the Conqueror, Queen Elizabeth, and Mary, queen of Scots, it is the design and object of these volumes to communicate, in a faithful, and, at the same time, if possible, in an attractive manner. Consequently, great historical names alone are selected; and it has been the writer's aim to present the prominent and leading traits in their

characters, and all the important events in their lives, in a bold and free manner, and yet in the plain and simple language which is so obviously required in works which aim at permanent and practical usefulness.

# **Chapter I.**

## **The Valley of the Nile**

The story of Cleopatra is a story of crime. It is a narrative of the course and the consequences of unlawful love. In her strange and romantic history we see this passion portrayed with the most complete and graphic fidelity in all its influences and effects; its uncontrollable impulses, its intoxicating joys, its reckless and mad career, and the dreadful remorse and ultimate despair and ruin in which it always and inevitably ends.

Cleopatra was by birth an Egyptian; by ancestry and descent she was a Greek. Thus, while Alexandria and the delta of the Nile formed the scene of the most important events and incidents of her history, it was the blood of Macedon which flowed in her veins. Her character and action are marked by the genius, the courage, the originality, and the impulsiveness pertaining to the stock from which she sprung. The events of her history, on the other hand, and the peculiar character of her adventures, her sufferings, and her sins, were determined by the circumstances with which she was surrounded, and the influences which were brought to bear upon her in the soft and voluptuous clime where the scenes of her early life were laid.

Egypt has always been considered as physically the most remarkable country on the globe. It is a long and narrow valley of

verdure and fruitfulness, completely insulated from the rest of the habitable world. It is more completely insulated, in fact, than any literal island could be, inasmuch as deserts are more impassable than seas. The very existence of Egypt is a most extraordinary phenomenon. If we could but soar with the wings of an eagle into the air, and look down upon the scene, so as to observe the operation of that grand and yet simple process by which this long and wonderful valley, teeming so profusely with animal and vegetable life, has been formed, and is annually revived and renewed, in the midst of surrounding wastes of silence, desolation, and death, we should gaze upon it with never-ceasing admiration and pleasure. We have not the wings of the eagle, but the generalizations of science furnish us with a sort of substitute for them. The long series of patient, careful, and sagacious observations, which have been continued now for two thousand years, bring us results, by means of which, through our powers of mental conception, we may take a comprehensive survey of the whole scene, analogous, in some respects, to that which direct and actual vision would afford us, if we could look down upon it from the eagle's point of view. It is, however, somewhat humiliating to our pride of intellect to reflect that long-continued philosophical investigations and learned scientific research are, in such a case as this, after all, in some sense, only a sort of substitute for wings. A human mind connected with a pair of eagle's wings would have solved the mystery of Egypt in a week; whereas science, philosophy, and research, confined to the

surface of the ground, have been occupied for twenty centuries in accomplishing the undertaking.

It is found at last that both the existence of Egypt itself, and its strange insulation in the midst of boundless tracts of dry and barren sand, depend upon certain remarkable results of the general laws of rain. The water which is taken up by the atmosphere from the surface of the sea and of the land by evaporation, falls again, under certain circumstances, in showers of rain, the frequency and copiousness of which vary very much in different portions of the earth. As a general principle, rains are much more frequent and abundant near the equator than in temperate climes, and they grow less and less so as we approach the poles. This might naturally have been expected; for, under the burning sun of the equator, the evaporation of water must necessarily go on with immensely greater rapidity than in the colder zones, and all the water which is taken up must, of course, again come down.

It is not, however, wholly by the latitude of the region in which the evaporation takes place that the quantity of rain which falls from the atmosphere is determined; for the condition on which the falling back, in rain, of the water which has been taken up by evaporation mainly depends, is the cooling of the atmospheric stratum which contains it; and this effect is produced in very various ways, and many different causes operate to modify it. Sometimes the stratum is cooled by being wafted over ranges of mountains; sometimes by encountering and becoming mingled



with cooler currents of air; and sometimes, again, by being driven in winds toward a higher, and, consequently, cooler latitude. If, on the other hand, air moves from cold mountains toward warm and sunny plains, or from higher latitudes to lower, or if, among the various currents into which it falls, it becomes mixed with air warmer than itself, its capacity for containing vapor in solution is increased, and, consequently, instead of releasing its hold upon the waters which it has already in possession, it becomes thirsty for more. It moves over a country, under these circumstances, as a warm and drying wind. Under a reverse of circumstances it would have formed drifting mists, or, perhaps, even copious showers of rain.

It will be evident, from these considerations, that the frequency of the showers, and the quantity of the rain which will fall, in the various regions respectively which the surface of the earth presents, must depend on the combined influence of many causes, such as the warmth of the climate, the proximity and the direction of mountains and of seas, the character of the prevailing winds, and the reflecting qualities of the soil. These and other similar causes, it is found, do, in fact, produce a vast difference in the quantity of rain which falls in different regions. In the northern part of South America, where the land is bordered on every hand by vast tropical seas, which load the hot and thirsty air with vapor, and where the mighty Cordillera of the Andes rears its icy summits to chill and precipitate the vapors again, a quantity of rain amounting to more than ten

feet in perpendicular height falls in a year. At St. Petersburg, on the other hand, the quantity thus falling in a year is but little more than one foot. The immense deluge which pours down from the clouds in South America would, if the water were to remain where it fell, wholly submerge and inundate the country. As it is, in flowing off through the valleys to the sea, the united torrents form the greatest river on the globe – the Amazon; and the vegetation, stimulated by the heat, and nourished by the abundant and incessant supplies of moisture, becomes so rank, and loads the earth with such an entangled and matted mass of trunks, and stems, and twining wreaths and vines, that man is almost excluded from the scene. The boundless forests become a vast and almost impenetrable jungle, abandoned to wild beasts, noxious reptiles, and huge and ferocious birds of prey.

Of course, the district of St. Petersburg, with its icy winter, its low and powerless sun, and its twelve inches of annual rain, must necessarily present, in all its phenomena of vegetable and animal life, a striking contrast to the exuberant prolificness of New Grenada. It is, however, after all, not absolutely the opposite extreme. There are certain regions on the surface of the earth that are actually rainless; and it is these which present us with the true and real contrast to the luxuriant vegetation and teeming life of the country of the Amazon. In these rainless regions all is necessarily silence, desolation, and death. No plant can grow; no animal can live. Man, too, is forever and hopelessly excluded. If the exuberant abundance of animal and vegetable life shut him

out, in some measure, from regions which an excess of heat and moisture render too prolific, the total absence of them still more effectually forbids him a home in these. They become, therefore, vast wastes of dry and barren sands in which no root can find nourishment, and of dreary rocks to which not even a lichen can cling.

The most extensive and remarkable rainless region on the earth is a vast tract extending through the interior and northern part of Africa, and the southwestern part of Asia. The Red Sea penetrates into this tract from the south, and thus breaks the outline and continuity of its form, without, however, altering, or essentially modifying its character. It divides it, however, and to the different portions which this division forms, different names have been given. The Asiatic portion is called Arabia Deserta; the African tract has received the name of Sahara; while between these two, in the neighborhood of Egypt, the barren region is called simply *the desert*. The whole tract is marked, however, throughout, with one all-pervading character: the absence of vegetable, and, consequently, of animal life, on account of the absence of rain. The rising of a range of lofty mountains in the center of it, to produce a precipitation of moisture from the air, would probably transform the whole of the vast waste into as verdant, and fertile, and populous a region as any on the globe.

As it is, there are no such mountains. The whole tract is nearly level, and so little elevated above the sea, that, at the distance of many hundred miles in the interior, the land rises

only to the height of a few hundred feet above the surface of the Mediterranean; whereas in New Grenada, at less than one hundred miles from the sea, the chain of the Andes rises to elevations of from ten to fifteen thousand feet. Such an ascent as that of a few hundred feet in hundreds of miles would be wholly imperceptible to any ordinary mode of observation; and the great rainless region, accordingly, of Africa and Asia is, as it appears to the traveler, one vast plain, a thousand miles wide and five thousand miles long, with only one considerable interruption to the dead monotony which reigns, with that exception, every where over the immense expanse of silence and solitude. The single interval of fruitfulness and life is the valley of the Nile.

There are, however, in fact, three interruptions to the continuity of this plain, though only one of them constitutes any considerable interruption to its barrenness. They are all of them valleys, extending from north to south, and lying side by side. The most easterly of these valleys is so deep that the waters of the ocean flow into it from the south, forming a long and narrow inlet called the Red Sea. As this inlet communicates freely with the ocean, it is always nearly of the same level, and as the evaporation from it is not sufficient to produce rain, it does not even fertilize its own shores. Its presence varies the dreary scenery of the landscape, it is true, by giving us surging waters to look upon instead of driving sands; but this is all. With the exception of the spectacle of an English steamer passing, at weary intervals, over its dreary expanse, and some moldering remains of ancient cities

on its eastern shore, it affords scarcely any indications of life. It does very little, therefore, to relieve the monotonous aspect of solitude and desolation which reigns over the region into which it has intruded.

The most westerly of the three valleys to which we have alluded is only a slight depression of the surface of the land marked by a line of *oases*. The depression is not sufficient to admit the waters of the Mediterranean, nor are there any rains over any portion of the valley which it forms sufficient to make it the bed of a stream. Springs issue, however, here and there, in several places, from the ground, and, percolating through the sands along the valley, give fertility to little dells, long and narrow, which, by the contrast that they form with the surrounding desolation, seem to the traveler to possess the verdure and beauty of Paradise. There is a line of these oases extending along this westerly depression, and some of them are of considerable extent. The oasis of Siweh, on which stood the far-famed temple of Jupiter Ammon, was many miles in extent, and was said to have contained in ancient times a population of eight thousand souls. Thus, while the most easterly of the three valleys which we have named was sunk so low as to admit the ocean to flow freely into it, the most westerly was so slightly depressed that it gained only a circumscribed and limited fertility through the springs, which, in the lowest portions of it, oozed from the ground. The third valley – the central one – remains now to be described.

The reader will observe, by referring once more to the map, that south of the great rainless region of which we are speaking, there lie groups and ranges of mountains in Abyssinia, called the Mountains of the Moon. These mountains are near the equator, and the relation which they sustain to the surrounding seas, and to currents of wind which blow in that quarter of the world, is such, that they bring down from the atmosphere, especially in certain seasons of the year, vast and continual torrents of rain. The water which thus falls drenches the mountain sides and deluges the valleys. There is a great portion of it which can not flow to the southward or eastward toward the sea, as the whole country consists, in those directions, of continuous tracts of elevated land. The rush of water thus turns to the northward, and, pressing on across the desert through the great central valley which we have referred to above, it finds an outlet, at last, in the Mediterranean, at a point two thousand miles distant from the place where the immense condenser drew it from the skies. The river thus created is the Nile. It is formed, in a word, by the surplus waters of a district inundated with rains, in their progress across a rainless desert, seeking the sea.

If the surplus of water upon the Abyssinian mountains had been constant and uniform, the stream, in its passage across the desert, would have communicated very little fertility to the barren sands which it traversed. The immediate banks of the river would have, perhaps, been fringed with verdure, but the influence of the irrigation would have extended no further than

the water itself could have reached, by percolation through the sand. But the flow of the water is not thus uniform and steady. In a certain season of the year the rains are incessant, and they descend with such abundance and profusion as almost to inundate the districts where they fall. Immense torrents stream down the mountain sides; the valleys are deluged; plains turn into morasses, and morasses into lakes. In a word, the country becomes half submerged, and the accumulated mass of waters would rush with great force and violence down the central valley of the desert, which forms their only outlet, if the passage were narrow, and if it made any considerable descent in its course to the sea. It is, however, not narrow, and the descent is very small. The depression in the surface of the desert, through which the water flows, is from five to ten miles wide, and, though it is nearly two thousand miles from the rainy district across the desert to the sea, the country for the whole distance is almost level. There is only sufficient descent, especially for the last thousand miles, to determine a very gentle current to the northward in the waters of the stream.

Under these circumstances, the immense quantity of water which falls in the rainy district in these inundating tropical showers, expands over the whole valley, and forms for a time an immense lake, extending in length across the whole breadth of the desert. This lake is, of course, from five to ten miles wide, and a thousand miles long. The water in it is shallow and turbid, and it has a gentle current toward the north. The rains, at length,

in a great measure cease; but it requires some months for the water to run off and leave the valley dry. As soon as it is gone, there springs up from the whole surface of the ground which has been thus submerged a most rank and luxuriant vegetation.

This vegetation, now wholly regulated and controlled by the hand of man, must have been, in its original and primeval state, of a very peculiar character. It must have consisted of such plants only as could exist under the condition of having the soil in which they grew laid, for a quarter of the year, wholly under water. This circumstance, probably, prevented the valley of the Nile from having been, like other fertile tracts of land, encumbered, in its native state, with forests. For the same reason, wild beasts could never have haunted it. There were no forests to shelter them, and no refuge or retreat for them but the dry and barren desert, during the period of the annual inundations. This most extraordinary valley seems thus to have been formed and preserved by Nature herself for the special possession of man. She herself seems to have held it in reserve for him from the very morning of creation, refusing admission into it to every plant and every animal that might hinder or disturb his occupancy and control. And if he were to abandon it now for a thousand years, and then return to it once more, he would find it just as he left it, ready for his immediate possession. There would be no wild beasts that he must first expel, and no tangled forests would have sprung up, that his ax must first remove. Nature is the husbandman who keeps this garden of the world in order, and the means



and machinery by which she operates are the grand evaporating surfaces of the seas, the beams of the tropical sun, the lofty summits of the Abyssinian mountains, and, as the product and result of all this instrumentality, great periodical inundations of summer rain.

For these or some other reasons Egypt has been occupied by man from the most remote antiquity. The oldest records of the human race, made three thousand years ago, speak of Egypt as ancient then, when they were written. Not only is Tradition silent, but even Fable herself does not attempt to tell the story of the origin of her population. Here stand the oldest and most enduring monuments that human power has ever been able to raise. It is, however, somewhat humiliating to the pride of the race to reflect that the loftiest and proudest, as well as the most permanent and stable of all the works which man has ever accomplished, are but the incidents and adjuncts of a thin stratum of alluvial fertility, left upon the sands by the subsiding waters of summer showers.

The most important portion of the alluvion of the Nile is the northern portion, where the valley widens and opens toward the sea, forming a triangular plain of about one hundred miles in length on each of the sides, over which the waters of the river flow in a great number of separate creeks and channels. The whole area forms a vast meadow, intersected every where with slow-flowing streams of water, and presenting on its surface the most enchanting pictures of fertility, abundance, and beauty. This region is called the Delta of the Nile.

The sea upon the coast is shallow, and the fertile country formed by the deposits of the river seems to have projected somewhat beyond the line of the coast; although, as the land has not advanced perceptibly for the last eighteen hundred years, it may be somewhat doubtful whether the whole of the apparent protrusion is not due to the natural conformation of the coast, rather than to any changes made by the action of the river.

The Delta of the Nile is so level itself, and so little raised above the level of the Mediterranean, that the land seems almost a continuation of the same surface with the sea, only, instead of blue waters topped with white-crested waves, we have broad tracts of waving grain, and gentle swells of land crowned with hamlets and villages. In approaching the coast, the navigator has no distant view of all this verdure and beauty. It lies so low that it continues beneath the horizon until the ship is close upon the shore. The first landmarks, in fact, which the seaman makes, are the tops of trees growing apparently out of the water, or the summit of an obelisk, or the capital of a pillar, marking the site of some ancient and dilapidated city.

The most easterly of the channels by which the waters of the river find their way through the Delta to the sea, is called, as it will be seen marked upon the map, the Pelusiatic branch. It forms almost the boundary of the fertile region of the Delta on the eastern side. There was an ancient city named Pelusium near the mouth of it. This was, of course, the first Egyptian city reached by those who arrived by land from the eastward, traveling along

the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. On account of its thus marking the eastern frontier of the country, it became a point of great importance, and is often mentioned in the histories of ancient times.

The westernmost mouth of the Nile, on the other hand, was called the Canopic mouth. The distance along the coast from the Canopic mouth to Pelusium was about a hundred miles. The outline of the coast was formerly, as it still continues to be, very irregular, and the water shallow. Extended banks of sand protruded into the sea, and the sea itself, as if in retaliation, formed innumerable creeks, and inlets, and lagoons in the land. Along this irregular and uncertain boundary the waters of the Nile and the surges of the Mediterranean kept up an eternal war, with energies so nearly equal, that now, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years since the state of the contest began to be recorded, neither side has been found to have gained any perceptible advantage over the other. The river brings the sands down, and the sea drives them incessantly back, keeping the whole line of the shore in such a condition as to make it extremely dangerous and difficult of access to man.

It will be obvious, from this description of the valley of the Nile, that it formed a country which was in ancient times isolated and secluded, in a very striking manner, from all the rest of the world. It was wholly shut in by deserts, on every side, by land; and the shoals, and sand-bars, and other dangers of navigation which marked the line of the coast, seemed to forbid approach

by sea. Here it remained for many ages, under the rule of its own native ancient kings. Its population was peaceful and industrious. Its scholars were famed throughout the world for their learning, their science, and their philosophy. It was in these ages, before other nations had intruded upon its peaceful seclusion, that the Pyramids were built, and the enormous monoliths carved, and those vast temples reared whose ruined columns are now the wonder of mankind. During these remote ages, too, Egypt was, as now, the land of perpetual fertility and abundance. There would always be corn in Egypt, wherever else famine might rage. The neighboring nations and tribes in Arabia, Palestine, and Syria, found their way to it, accordingly, across the deserts on the eastern side, when driven by want, and thus opened a way of communication. At length the Persian monarchs, after extending their empire westward to the Mediterranean, found access by the same road to Pelusium, and thence overran and conquered the country. At last, about two hundred and fifty years before the time of Cleopatra, Alexander the Great, when he subverted the Persian empire, took possession of Egypt, and annexed it, among the other Persian provinces, to his own dominions. At the division of Alexander's empire, after his death, Egypt fell to one of his generals, named Ptolemy. Ptolemy made it his kingdom, and left it, at his death, to his heirs. A long line of sovereigns succeeded him, known in history as the dynasty of the Ptolemies – Greek princes, reigning over an Egyptian realm. Cleopatra was the daughter of the eleventh in the line.

The capital of the Ptolemies was Alexandria. Until the time of Alexander's conquest, Egypt had no sea-port. There were several landing-places along the coast, but no proper harbor. In fact, Egypt had then so little commercial intercourse with the rest of the world, that she scarcely needed any. Alexander's engineers, however, in exploring the shore, found a point not far from the Canopic mouth of the Nile where the water was deep, and where there was an anchorage ground protected by an island. Alexander founded a city there, which he called by his own name. He perfected the harbor by artificial excavations and embankments. A lofty light-house was reared, which formed a landmark by day, and exhibited a blazing star by night to guide the galleys of the Mediterranean in. A canal was made to connect the port with the Nile, and warehouses were erected to contain the stores of merchandise. In a word, Alexandria became at once a great commercial capital. It was the seat, for several centuries, of the magnificent government of the Ptolemies; and so well was its situation chosen for the purposes intended, that it still continues, after the lapse of twenty centuries of revolution and change, one of the principal emporiums of the commerce of the East.

## **Chapter II.**

### **The Ptolemies**

The founder of the dynasty of the Ptolemies – the ruler into whose hands the kingdom of Egypt fell, as has already been stated, at the death of Alexander the Great – was a Macedonian general in Alexander's army. The circumstances of his birth, and the events which led to his entering into the service of Alexander, were somewhat peculiar. His mother, whose name was Arsinoë, was a personal favorite and companion of Philip, king of Macedon, the father of Alexander. Philip at length gave Arsinoë in marriage to a certain man of his court named Lagus. A very short time after the marriage, Ptolemy was born. Philip treated the child with the same consideration and favor that he had evinced toward the mother. The boy was called the son of Lagus, but his position in the royal court of Macedon was as high and honorable, and the attentions which he received were as great, as he could have expected to enjoy if he had been in reality a son of the king. As he grew up, he attained to official stations of considerable responsibility and power.

In the course of time, a certain transaction occurred, by means of which Ptolemy involved himself in serious difficulty with Philip, though by the same means he made Alexander very strongly his friend. There was a province of the Persian

empire called Caria, situated in the southwestern part of Asia Minor. The governor of this province had offered his daughter to Philip as the wife of one of his sons named Aridæus, the half brother of Alexander. Alexander's mother, who was not the mother of Aridæus, was jealous of this proposed marriage. She thought that it was part of a scheme for bringing Aridæus forward into public notice, and finally making him the heir to Philip's throne; whereas she was very earnest that this splendid inheritance should be reserved for her own son. Accordingly, she proposed to Alexander that they should send a secret embassy to the Persian governor, and represent to him that it would be much better, both for him and for his daughter, that she should have Alexander instead of Aridæus for a husband, and induce him, if possible, to demand of Philip that he should make the change.

Alexander entered readily into this scheme, and various courtiers, Ptolemy among the rest, undertook to aid him in the accomplishment of it. The embassy was sent. The governor of Caria was very much pleased with the change which they proposed to him. In fact, the whole plan seemed to be going on very successfully toward its accomplishment, when, by some means or other, Philip discovered the intrigue. He went immediately into Alexander's apartment, highly excited with resentment and anger. He had never intended to make Aridæus, whose birth on the mother's side was obscure and ignoble, the heir to his throne, and he reproached Alexander in the bitterest

terms for being of so debased and degenerate a spirit as to desire to marry the daughter of a Persian governor; a man who was, in fact, the mere slave, as he said, of a barbarian king.

Alexander's scheme was thus totally defeated; and so displeased was his father with the officers who had undertaken to aid him in the execution of it, that he banished them all from the kingdom. Ptolemy, in consequence of this decree, wandered about an exile from his country for some years, until at length the death of Philip enabled Alexander to recall him. Alexander succeeded his father as King of Macedon, and immediately made Ptolemy one of his principal generals. Ptolemy rose, in fact, to a very high command in the Macedonian army, and distinguished himself very greatly in all the celebrated conqueror's subsequent campaigns. In the Persian invasion, Ptolemy commanded one of the three grand divisions of the army, and he rendered repeatedly the most signal services to the cause of his master. He was employed on the most distant and dangerous enterprises, and was often intrusted with the management of affairs of the utmost importance. He was very successful in all his undertakings. He conquered armies, reduced fortresses, negotiated treaties, and evinced, in a word, the highest degree of military energy and skill. He once saved Alexander's life by discovering and revealing a dangerous conspiracy which had been formed against the king. Alexander had the opportunity to requite this favor, through a divine interposition vouchsafed to him, it was said, for the express purpose of enabling him to evince his gratitude.



Ptolemy had been wounded by a poisoned arrow, and when all the remedies and antidotes of the physicians had failed, and the patient was apparently about to die, an effectual means of cure was revealed to Alexander in a dream, and Ptolemy, in his turn, was saved.

At the great rejoicings at Susa, when Alexander's conquests were completed, Ptolemy was honored with a golden crown, and he was married, with great pomp and ceremony, to Artacama, the daughter of one of the most distinguished Persian generals.

At length Alexander died suddenly, after a night of drinking and carousal at Babylon. He had no son old enough to succeed him, and his immense empire was divided among his generals. Ptolemy obtained Egypt for his share. He repaired immediately to Alexandria, with a great army, and a great number of Greek attendants and followers, and there commenced a reign which continued, in great prosperity and splendor, for forty years. The native Egyptians were reduced, of course, to subjection and bondage. All the offices in the army, and all stations of trust and responsibility in civil life, were filled by Greeks. Alexandria was a Greek city, and it became at once one of the most important commercial centers in all those seas. Greek and Roman travelers found now a language spoken in Egypt which they could understand, and philosophers and scholars could gratify the curiosity which they had so long felt, in respect to the institutions, and monuments, and wonderful physical characteristics of the country, with safety and pleasure. In a word, the organization

of a Greek government over the ancient kingdom, and the establishment of the great commercial relations of the city of Alexandria, conspired to bring Egypt out from its concealment and seclusion, and to open it in some measure to the intercourse, as well as to bring it more fully under the observation, of the rest of mankind.

Ptolemy, in fact, made it a special object of his policy to accomplish these ends. He invited Greek scholars, philosophers, poets, and artists, in great numbers, to come to Alexandria, and to make his capital their abode. He collected an immense library, which subsequently, under the name of the Alexandrian library, became one of the most celebrated collections of books and manuscripts that was ever made. We shall have occasion to refer more particularly to this library in the next chapter.

Besides prosecuting these splendid schemes for the aggrandizement of Egypt, King Ptolemy was engaged, during almost the whole period of his reign, in waging incessant wars with the surrounding nations. He engaged in these wars, in part, for the purpose of extending the boundaries of his empire, and in part for self-defense against the aggressions and encroachments of other powers. He finally succeeded in establishing his kingdom on the most stable and permanent basis, and then, when he was drawing toward the close of his life, being in fact over eighty years of age, he abdicated his throne in favor of his youngest son, whose name was also Ptolemy. Ptolemy the father, the founder of the dynasty, is known commonly in

history by the name of Ptolemy Soter. His son is called Ptolemy Philadelphus. This son, though the youngest, was preferred to his brothers as heir to the throne on account of his being the son of the most favored and beloved of the monarch's wives. The determination of Soter to abdicate the throne himself arose from his wish to put this favorite son in secure possession of it before his death, in order to prevent the older brothers from disputing the succession. The coronation of Philadelphus was made one of the most magnificent and imposing ceremonies that royal pomp and parade ever arranged. Two years afterward Ptolemy the father died, and was buried by his son with a magnificence almost equal to that of his own coronation. His body was deposited in a splendid mausoleum, which had been built for the remains of Alexander; and so high was the veneration which was felt by mankind for the greatness of his exploits and the splendor of his reign, that divine honors were paid to his memory. Such was the origin of the great dynasty of the Ptolemies.

Some of the early sovereigns of the line followed in some degree the honorable example set them by the distinguished founder of it; but this example was soon lost, and was succeeded by the most extreme degeneracy and debasement. The successive sovereigns began soon to live and to reign solely for the gratification of their own sensual propensities and passions. Sensuality begins sometimes with kindness, but it ends always in the most reckless and intolerable cruelty. The Ptolemies became, in the end, the most abominable and terrible tyrants that the

principle of absolute and irresponsible power ever produced. There was one vice in particular, a vice which they seem to have adopted from the Asiatic nations of the Persian empire, that resulted in the most awful consequences. This vice was incest.

The law of God, proclaimed not only in the Scriptures, but in the native instincts of the human soul, forbids intermarriages among those connected by close ties of consanguinity. The necessity for such a law rests on considerations which can not here be fully explained. They are considerations, however, which arise from causes inherent in the very nature of man as a social being, and which are of universal, perpetual, and insurmountable force. To guard his creatures against the deplorable consequences, both physical and moral, which result from the practice of such marriages, the great Author of Nature has implanted in every mind an instinctive sense of their criminality, powerful enough to give effectual warning of the danger, and so universal as to cause a distinct condemnation of them to be recorded in almost every code of written law that has ever been promulgated among mankind. The Persian sovereigns were, however, above all law, and every species of incestuous marriage was practiced by them without shame. The Ptolemies followed their example.

One of the most striking exhibitions of the nature of incestuous domestic life which is afforded by the whole dismal panorama of pagan vice and crime, is presented in the history of the great-grandfather of the Cleopatra who is the principal

subject of this narrative. He was Ptolemy Physcon, the seventh in the line. It is necessary to give some particulars of his history and that of his family, in order to explain the circumstances under which Cleopatra herself came upon the stage. The name Physcon, which afterward became his historical designation, was originally given him in contempt and derision. He was very small of stature in respect to height, but his gluttony and sensuality had made him immensely corpulent in body, so that he looked more like a monster than a man. The term Physcon was a Greek word, which denoted opprobriously the ridiculous figure that he made.

The circumstances of Ptolemy Physcon's accession to the throne afford not only a striking illustration of his character, but a very faithful though terrible picture of the manners and morals of the times. He had been engaged in a long and cruel war with his brother, who was king before him, in which war he had perpetrated all imaginable atrocities, when at length his brother died, leaving as his survivors his wife, who was also his sister, and a son who was yet a child. This son was properly the heir to the crown. Physcon himself, being a brother, had no claim, as against a son. The name of the queen was Cleopatra. This was, in fact, a very common name among the princesses of the Ptolemaic line. Cleopatra, besides her son, had a daughter, who was at this time a young and beautiful girl. Her name was also Cleopatra. She was, of course, the niece, as her mother was the sister, of Physcon.

The plan of Cleopatra the mother, after her husband's death,

was to make her son the king of Egypt, and to govern herself, as regent, until he should become of age. The friends and adherents of Physcon, however, formed a strong party in *his* favor. They sent for him to come to Alexandria to assert his claims to the throne. He came, and a new civil war was on the point of breaking out between the brother and sister, when at length the dispute was settled by a treaty, in which it was stipulated that Physcon should marry Cleopatra, and be king; but that he should make the son of Cleopatra by her former husband his heir. This treaty was carried into effect so far as the celebration of the marriage with the mother was concerned, and the establishment of Physcon upon the throne. But the perfidious monster, instead of keeping his faith in respect to the boy, determined to murder him; and so open and brutal were his habits of violence and cruelty, that he undertook to perpetrate the deed himself, in open day. The boy fled shrieking to the mother's arms for protection, and Physcon stabbed and killed him there, exhibiting the spectacle of a newly-married husband murdering the son of his wife in her very arms!

It is easy to conceive what sort of affection would exist between a husband and a wife after such transactions as these. In fact, there had been no love between them from the beginning. The marriage had been solely a political arrangement. Physcon hated his wife, and had murdered her son, and then, as if to complete the exhibition of the brutal lawlessness and capriciousness of his passions, he ended with falling in love with her daughter. The beautiful girl looked upon this heartless

monster, as ugly and deformed in body as he was in mind, with absolute horror. But she was wholly in his power. He compelled her, by violence, to submit to his will. He repudiated the mother, and forced the daughter to become his wife.

Physson displayed the same qualities of brutal tyranny and cruelty in the treatment of his subjects that he manifested in his own domestic relations. The particulars we can not here give, but can only say that his atrocities became at length absolutely intolerable, and a revolt so formidable broke out, that he fled from the country. In fact, he barely escaped with his life, as the mob had surrounded the palace and were setting it on fire, intending to burn the tyrant himself and all the accomplices of his crimes together. Physson, however, contrived to make his escape. He fled to the island of Cyprus, taking with him a certain beautiful boy, his son by the Cleopatra whom he had divorced; for they had been married long enough, before the divorce, to have a son. The name of this boy was Memphitis. His mother was very tenderly attached to him, and Physson took him away on this very account, to keep him as a hostage for his mother's good behavior. He fancied that, when he was gone, she might possibly attempt to resume possession of the throne.

His expectations in this respect were realized. The people of Alexandria rallied around Cleopatra, and called upon her to take the crown. She did so, feeling, perhaps, some misgivings in respect to the danger which such a step might possibly bring upon her absent boy. She quieted herself, however, by the thought that

he was in the hands of his own father, and that he could not possibly come to harm.

After some little time had elapsed, and Cleopatra was beginning to be well established in her possession of the supreme power at Alexandria, her birth-day approached, and arrangements were made for celebrating it in the most magnificent manner. When the day arrived, the whole city was given up to festivities and rejoicing. Grand entertainments were given in the palace, and games, spectacles, and plays in every variety, were exhibited and performed in all quarters of the city. Cleopatra herself was enjoying a magnificent entertainment, given to the lords and ladies of the court and the officers of her army, in one of the royal palaces.

In the midst of this scene of festivity and pleasure, it was announced to the queen that a large box had arrived for her. The box was brought into the apartment. It had the appearance of containing some magnificent present, sent in at that time by some friend in honor of the occasion. The curiosity of the queen was excited to know what the mysterious coffer might contain. She ordered it to be opened; and the guests gathered around, each eager to obtain the first glimpse of the contents. The lid was removed, and a cloth beneath it was raised, when, to the unutterable horror of all who witnessed the spectacle, there was seen the head and hands of Cleopatra's beautiful boy, lying among masses of human flesh, which consisted of the rest of his body cut into pieces. The head had been left



entire, that the wretched mother might recognize in the pale and lifeless features the countenance of her son. Physcon had sent the box to Alexandria, with orders that it should be retained until the evening of the birth-day, and then presented publicly to Cleopatra in the midst of the festivities of the scene. The shrieks and cries with which she filled the apartments of the palace at the first sight of the dreadful spectacle, and the agony of long-continued and inconsolable grief which followed, showed how well the cruel contrivance of the tyrant was fitted to accomplish its end.

It gives us no pleasure to write, and we are sure it can give our readers no pleasure to peruse, such shocking stories of bloody cruelty as these. It is necessary, however, to a just appreciation of the character of the great subject of this history, that we should understand the nature of the domestic influences that reigned in the family from which she sprung. In fact, it is due, as a matter of simple justice to her, that we should know what these influences were, and what were the examples set before her in her early life; since the privileges and advantages which the young enjoy in their early years, and, on the other hand, the evil influences under which they suffer, are to be taken very seriously into the account when we are passing judgment upon the follies and sins into which they subsequently fall.

The monster Physcon lived, it is true, two or three generations before the great Cleopatra; but the character of the intermediate generations, until the time of her birth, continued much the same.

In fact, the cruelty, corruption, and vice which reigned in every branch of the royal family increased rather than diminished. The beautiful niece of Physcon, who, at the time of her compulsory marriage with him, evinced such an aversion to the monster, had become, at the period of her husband's death, as great a monster of ambition, selfishness, and cruelty as he. She had two sons, Lathyrus and Alexander. Physcon, when he died, left the kingdom of Egypt to her by will, authorizing her to associate with her in the government whichever of these two sons she might choose. The oldest was best entitled to this privilege, by his priority of birth; but she preferred the youngest, as she thought that her own power would be more absolute in reigning in conjunction with him, since he would be more completely under her control. The leading powers, however, in Alexandria, resisted this plan, and insisted on Cleopatra's associating her oldest son, Lathyrus, with her in the government of the realm. They compelled her to recall Lathyrus from the banishment into which she had sent him, and to put him nominally upon the throne. Cleopatra yielded to this necessity, but she forced her son to repudiate his wife, and to take, instead, another woman, whom she fancied she could make more subservient to her will. The mother and the son went on together for a time, Lathyrus being nominally king, though her determination that she would rule, and his struggles to resist her intolerable tyranny, made their wretched household the scene of terrible and perpetual quarrels. At last Cleopatra seized a number of Lathyrus's servants, the

eunuchs who were employed in various offices about the palace, and after wounding and mutilating them in a horrible manner, she exhibited them to the populace, saying that it was Lathyrus that had inflicted the cruel injuries upon the sufferers, and calling upon them to arise and punish him for his crimes. In this and in other similar ways she awakened among the people of the court and of the city such an animosity against Lathyrus, that they expelled him from the country. There followed a long series of cruel and bloody wars between the mother and the son, in the course of which each party perpetrated against the other almost every imaginable deed of atrocity and crime. Alexander, the youngest son, was so afraid of his terrible mother, that he did not dare to remain in Alexandria with her, but went into a sort of banishment of his own accord. He, however, finally returned to Egypt. His mother immediately supposed that he was intending to disturb her possession of power, and resolved to destroy him. He became acquainted with her designs, and, grown desperate by the long-continued pressure of her intolerable tyranny, he resolved to bring the anxiety and terror in which he lived to an end by killing her. This he did, and then fled the country. Lathyrus, his brother, then returned, and reigned for the rest of his days in a tolerable degree of quietness and peace. At length Lathyrus died, and left the kingdom to his son, Ptolemy Auletes, who was the great Cleopatra's father.

We can not soften the picture which is exhibited to our view in the history of this celebrated family, by regarding the

mother of Auletes, in the masculine and merciless traits and principles which she displayed so energetically throughout her terrible career, as an exception to the general character of the princesses who appeared from time to time in the line. In ambition, selfishness, unnatural and reckless cruelty, and utter disregard of every virtuous principle and of every domestic tie, she was but the type and representative of all the rest.

She had two daughters, for example, who were the consistent and worthy followers of such a mother. A passage in the lives of these sisters illustrates very forcibly the kind of sisterly affection which prevailed in the family of the Ptolemies. The case was this:

There were two princes of Syria, a country lying northeast of the Mediterranean Sea, and so not very far from Egypt, who, though they were brothers, were in a state of most deadly hostility to each other. One had attempted to poison the other, and afterward a war had broken out between them, and all Syria was suffering from the ravages of their armies. One of the sisters, of whom we have been speaking, married one of these princes. Her name was Tryphena. After some time, but yet while the unnatural war was still raging between the two brothers, Cleopatra, the other sister – the same Cleopatra, in fact, that had been divorced from Lathyrus at the instance of his mother – espoused the other brother. Tryphena was exceedingly incensed against Cleopatra for marrying her husband's mortal foe, and the implacable hostility and hate of the sisters was thenceforth added to that which the brothers had before exhibited, to complete the

display of unnatural and parricidal passion which this shameful contest presented to the world.

In fact, Tryphena from this time seemed to feel a new and highly-excited interest in the contest, from her eager desire to revenge herself on her sister. She watched the progress of it, and took an active part in pressing forward the active prosecution of the war. The party of her husband, either from this or some other causes, seemed to be gaining the day. The husband of Cleopatra was driven from one part of the country to another, and at length, in order to provide for the security of his wife, he left her in Antioch, a large and strongly-fortified city, where he supposed that she would be safe, while he himself was engaged in prosecuting the war in other quarters where his presence seemed to be required.

On learning that her sister was at Antioch, Tryphena urged her husband to attack the place. He accordingly advanced with a strong detachment of the army, and besieged and took the city. Cleopatra would, of course, have fallen into his hands as a captive; but, to escape this fate, she fled to a temple for refuge. A temple was considered, in those days, an inviolable sanctuary. The soldiers accordingly left her there. Tryphena, however, made a request that her husband would deliver the unhappy fugitive into her hands. She was determined, she said, to kill her. Her husband remonstrated with her against this atrocious proposal. "It would be a wholly useless act of cruelty," said he, "to destroy her life. She can do us no possible harm in the future progress of

the war, while to murder her under these circumstances will only exasperate her husband and her friends, and nerve them with new strength for the remainder of the contest. And then, besides, she has taken refuge in a temple; and if we violate that sanctuary, we shall incur, by such an act of sacrilege, the implacable displeasure of heaven. Consider, too, that she is your sister, and for you to kill her would be to commit an unnatural and wholly inexcusable crime.”

So saying, he commanded Tryphena to say no more upon the subject, for he would on no account consent that Cleopatra should suffer any injury whatever.

This refusal on the part of her husband to comply with her request only inflamed Tryphena’s insane resentment and anger the more. In fact, the earnestness with which he espoused her sister’s cause, and the interest which he seemed to feel in her fate, aroused Tryphena’s jealousy. She believed, or pretended to believe, that her husband was influenced by a sentiment of love in so warmly defending her. The object of her hate, from being simply an enemy, became now, in her view, a rival, and she resolved that, at all hazards, she should be destroyed. She accordingly ordered a body of desperate soldiers to break into the temple and seize her. Cleopatra fled in terror to the altar, and clung to it with such convulsive force that the soldiers cut her hands off before they could tear her away, and then, maddened by her resistance and the sight of blood, they stabbed her again and again upon the floor of the temple, where she fell. The

appalling shrieks with which the wretched victim filled the air in the first moments of her flight and her terror, subsided, as her life ebbed away, into the most awful imprecations of the judgments of heaven upon the head of the unnatural sister whose implacable hate had destroyed her.

Notwithstanding the specimens that we have thus given of the character and action of this extraordinary family, the government of this dynasty, extending, as it did, through the reigns of thirteen sovereigns and over a period of nearly three hundred years, has always been considered one of the most liberal, enlightened, and prosperous of all the governments of ancient times. We shall have something to say in the next chapter in respect to the internal condition of the country while these violent men were upon the throne. In the meantime, we will here only add, that whoever is inclined, in observing the ambition, the selfishness, the party spirit, the unworthy intrigues, and the irregularities of moral conduct, which modern rulers and statesmen sometimes exhibit to mankind in their personal and political career, to believe in a retrogression and degeneracy of national character as the world advances in age, will be very effectually undeceived by reading attentively a full history of this celebrated dynasty, and reflecting, as he reads, that the narrative presents, on the whole, a fair and honest exhibition of the general character of the men by whom, in ancient times, the world was governed.

## **Chapter III.**

### **Alexandria**

It must not be imagined by the reader that the scenes of vicious indulgence, and reckless cruelty and crime, which were exhibited with such dreadful frequency, and carried to such an enormous excess in the palaces of the Egyptian kings, prevailed to the same extent throughout the mass of the community during the period of their reign. The internal administration of government, and the institutions by which the industrial pursuits of the mass of the people were regulated, and peace and order preserved, and justice enforced between man and man, were all this time in the hands of men well qualified, on the whole, for the trusts committed to their charge, and in a good degree faithful in the performance of their duties; and thus the ordinary affairs of government, and the general routine of domestic and social life, went on, notwithstanding the profligacy of the kings, in a course of very tolerable peace, prosperity, and happiness. During every one of the three hundred years over which the history of the Ptolemies extends, the whole length and breadth of the land of Egypt exhibited, with comparatively few interruptions, one wide-spread scene of busy industry. The inundations came at their appointed season, and then regularly retired. The boundless fields which the waters had fertilized were then every where



tilled. The lands were plowed; the seed was sown; the canals and water-courses, which ramified from the river in every direction over the ground, were opened or closed, as the case required, to regulate the irrigation. The inhabitants were busy, and, consequently, they were virtuous. And as the sky of Egypt is seldom or never darkened by clouds and storms, the scene presented to the eye the same unchanging aspect of smiling verdure and beauty, day after day, and month after month, until the ripened grain was gathered into the store-houses, and the land was cleared for another inundation.

We say that the people were virtuous because they were busy; for there is no principle of political economy more fully established than that vice in the social state is the incident and symptom of idleness. It prevails always in those classes of every great population who are either released by the possession of fixed and unchangeable wealth from the necessity, or excluded by their poverty and degradation from the advantage, of useful employment. Wealth that is free, and subject to its possessor's control, so that he can, if he will, occupy himself in the management of it, while it sometimes may make individuals vicious, does not generally corrupt classes of men, for it does not make them idle. But wherever the institutions of a country are such as to create an aristocratic class, whose incomes depend on entailed estates, or on fixed and permanent annuities, so that the capital on which they live can not afford them any mental occupation, they are doomed necessarily to inaction and idleness.

Vicious pleasures and indulgences are, with such a class as a whole, the inevitable result; for the innocent enjoyments of man are planned and designed by the Author of nature only for the intervals of rest and repose in a life of activity. They are always found wholly insufficient to satisfy one who makes pleasure the whole end and aim of his being.

In the same manner, if, either from the influence of the social institutions of a country, or from the operation of natural causes which human power is unable to control, there is a class of men too low, and degraded, and miserable to be reached by the ordinary inducements to daily toil, so certain are they to grow corrupt and depraved, that degradation has become in all languages a term almost synonymous with vice. There are many exceptions, it is true, to these general laws. Many active men are very wicked; and there have been frequent instances of the most exalted virtue among nobles and kings. Still, as a general law, it is unquestionably true that vice is the incident of idleness; and the sphere of vice, therefore, is at the top and at the bottom of society – those being the regions in which idleness reigns. The great remedy, too, for vice is employment. To make a community virtuous, it is essential that all ranks and gradations of it, from the highest to the lowest, should have something to do.

In accordance with these principles, we observe that, while the most extreme and abominable wickedness seemed to hold continual and absolute sway in the palaces of the Ptolemies, and among the nobles of their courts, the working ministers of

state, and the men on whom the actual governmental functions devolved, discharged their duties with wisdom and fidelity, and throughout all the ordinary ranks and gradations of society there prevailed generally a very considerable degree of industry, prosperity, and happiness. This prosperity prevailed not only in the rural districts of the Delta and along the valley of the Nile, but also among the merchants, and navigators, and artisans of Alexandria.

Alexandria became, in fact, very soon after it was founded, a very great and busy city. Many things conspired to make it at once a great commercial emporium. In the first place, it was the depôt of export for all the surplus grain and other agricultural produce which was raised in such abundance along the Egyptian valley. This produce was brought down in boats to the upper point of the Delta, where the branches of the river divided, and thence down the Canopic branch to the city. The city was not, in fact, situated directly upon this branch, but upon a narrow tongue of land, at a little distance from it, near the sea. It was not easy to enter the channel directly, on account of the bars and sand-banks at its mouth, produced by the eternal conflict between the waters of the river and the surges of the sea. The water was deep, however, as Alexander's engineers had discovered, at the place where the city was built, and, by establishing the port there, and then cutting a canal across to the Nile, they were enabled to bring the river and the sea at once into easy communication.

The produce of the valley was thus brought down the river

and through the canal to the city. Here immense warehouses and granaries were erected for its reception, that it might be safely preserved until the ships that came into the port were ready to take it away. These ships came from Syria, from all the coasts of Asia Minor, from Greece, and from Rome. They brought the agricultural productions of their own countries, as well as articles of manufacture of various kinds; these they sold to the merchants of Alexandria, and purchased the productions of Egypt in return.

The port of Alexandria presented thus a constant picture of life and animation. Merchant ships were continually coming and going, or lying at anchor in the roadstead. Seamen were hoisting sails, or raising anchors, or rowing their capacious galleys through the water, singing, as they pulled, to the motion of the oars. Within the city there was the same ceaseless activity. Here groups of men were unloading the canal boats which had arrived from the river. There porters were transporting bales of merchandise or sacks of grain from a warehouse to a pier, or from one landing to another. The occasional parading of the king's guards, or the arrival and departure of ships of war to land or to take away bodies of armed men, were occurrences that sometimes intervened to interrupt, or as perhaps the people then would have said, to adorn this scene of useful industry; and now and then, for a brief period, these peaceful avocations would be wholly suspended and set aside by a revolt or by a civil war, waged by rival brothers against each other, or instigated by the conflicting claims of a mother and son. These

interruptions, however, were comparatively few, and, in ordinary cases, not of long continuance. It was for the interest of all branches of the royal line to do as little injury as possible to the commercial and agricultural operations of the realm. In fact, it was on the prosperity of those operations that the revenues depended. The rulers were well aware of this, and so, however implacably two rival princes may have hated one another, and however desperately each party may have struggled to destroy all active combatants whom they should find in arms against them, they were both under every possible inducement to spare the private property and the lives of the peaceful population. This population, in fact, engaged thus in profitable industry, constituted, with the avails of their labors, the very estate for which the combatants were contending.

Seeing the subject in this light, the Egyptian sovereigns, especially Alexander and the earlier Ptolemies, made every effort in their power to promote the commercial greatness of Alexandria. They built palaces, it is true, but they also built warehouses. One of the most expensive and celebrated of all the edifices that they reared was the light-house which has been already alluded to. This light-house was a lofty tower, built of white marble. It was situated upon the island of Pharos, opposite to the city, and at some distance from it. There was a sort of isthmus of shoals and sand-bars connecting the island with the shore. Over these shallows a pier or causeway was built, which finally became a broad and inhabited neck. The principal part of

the ancient city, however, was on the main land.<sup>1</sup>

The curvature of the earth requires that a light-house on a coast should have a considerable elevation, otherwise its summit would not appear above the horizon, unless the mariner were very near. To attain this elevation, the architects usually take advantage of some hill or cliff, or rocky eminence near the shore. There was, however, no opportunity to do this at Pharos; for the island was, like the main land, level and low. The requisite elevation could only be attained, therefore, by the masonry of an edifice, and the blocks of marble necessary for the work had to be brought from a great distance. The Alexandrian light-house was reared in the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the second monarch in the line. No pains or expense were spared in its construction. The edifice, when completed, was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. It was indebted for its fame, however, in some degree, undoubtedly to the conspicuousness of its situation, rising, as it did, at the entrance of the greatest commercial emporium of its time, and standing there, like a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, to attract the welcome gaze of every wandering mariner whose ship came within its horizon, and to awaken his gratitude by tendering him its guidance and dispelling his fears.

The light at the top of the tower was produced by a fire, made of such combustibles as would emit the brightest flame. This fire burned slowly through the day, and then was kindled up

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<sup>1</sup> See Map of the Delta of the Nile, [page 29](#); also the View of Alexandria, page 162.

anew when the sun went down, and was continually replenished through the night with fresh supplies of fuel. In modern times, a much more convenient and economical mode is adopted to produce the requisite illumination. A great blazing lamp burns brilliantly in the center of the lantern of the tower, and all that part of the radiation from the flame which would naturally have beamed upward, or downward, or laterally, or back toward the land, is so turned by a curious system of reflectors and polyzonal lenses, most ingeniously contrived and very exactly adjusted, as to be thrown forward in one broad and thin, but brilliant sheet of light, which shoots out where its radiance is needed, over the surface of the sea. Before these inventions were perfected, far the largest portion of the light emitted by the illumination of light-house towers streamed away wastefully in landward directions, or was lost among the stars.

Of course, the glory of erecting such an edifice as the Pharos of Alexandria, and of maintaining it in the performance of its functions, was very great; the question might, however, very naturally arise whether this glory was justly due to the architect through whose scientific skill the work was actually accomplished, or to the monarch by whose power and resources the architect was sustained. The name of the architect was Sostratus. He was a Greek. The monarch was, as has already been stated, the second Ptolemy, called commonly Ptolemy Philadelphus. Ptolemy ordered that, in completing the tower, a marble tablet should be built into the wall, at a suitable

place near the summit, and that a proper inscription should be carved upon it, with his name as the builder of the edifice conspicuous thereon. Sostratus preferred inserting his own name. He accordingly made the tablet and set it in its place. He cut the inscription upon the face of it, in Greek characters, with his own name as the author of the work. He did this secretly, and then covered the face of the tablet with an artificial composition, made with lime, to imitate the natural surface of the stone. On this outer surface he cut a new inscription, in which he inserted the name of the king. In process of time the lime moldered away, the king's inscription disappeared, and his own, which thenceforward continued as long as the building endured, came out to view.

The Pharos was said to have been four hundred feet high. It was famed throughout the world for many centuries; nothing, however, remains of it now but a heap of useless and unmeaning ruins.

Besides the light that beamed from the summit of this lofty tower, there was another center of radiance and illumination in ancient Alexandria, which was in some respects still more conspicuous and renowned, namely, an immense library and museum established and maintained by the Ptolemies. The Museum, which was first established, was not, as its name might now imply, a collection of curiosities, but an institution of learning, consisting of a body of learned men, who devoted their time to philosophical and scientific pursuits. The institution



was richly endowed, and magnificent buildings were erected for its use. The king who established it began immediately to make a collection of books for the use of the members of the institution. This was attended with great expense, as every book that was added to the collection required to be transcribed with a pen on parchment or papyrus, with infinite labor and care. Great numbers of scribes were constantly employed upon this work at the Museum. The kings who were most interested in forming this library would seize the books that were possessed by individual scholars, or that were deposited in the various cities of their dominions, and then, causing beautiful copies of them to be made by the scribes of the Museum, they would retain the originals for the great Alexandrian Library, and give the copies to the men or the cities that had been thus despoiled. In the same manner they would borrow, as they called it, from all travelers who visited Egypt, any valuable books which they might have in their possession, and, retaining the originals, give them back copies instead.

In process of time the library increased to four hundred thousand volumes. There was then no longer any room in the buildings of the Museum for further additions. There was, however, in another part of the city, a great temple called the Serapion. This temple was a very magnificent edifice, or, rather, group of edifices, dedicated to the god Serapis. The origin and history of this temple were very remarkable. The legend was this: It seems that one of the ancient and long-venerated gods

of the Egyptians was a deity named Serapis. He had been, among other divinities, the object of Egyptian adoration ages before Alexandria was built or the Ptolemies reigned. There was also, by a curious coincidence, a statue of the same name at a great commercial town named Sinope, which was built upon the extremity of a promontory which projected from Asia Minor into the Euxine Sea.<sup>2</sup> Sinope was, in some sense, the Alexandria of the north, being the center and seat of a great portion of the commerce of that quarter of the world.

The Serapis of Sinope was considered as the protecting deity of seamen, and the navigators who came and went to and from the city made sacrifices to him, and offered him oblations and prayers, believing that they were, in a great measure, dependent upon some mysterious and inscrutable power which he exercised for their safety in storms. They carried the knowledge of his name, and tales of his imaginary interpositions, to all the places that they visited; and thus the fame of the god became extended, first, to all the coasts of the Euxine Sea, and subsequently to distant provinces and kingdoms. The Serapis of Sinope began to be considered every where as the tutelar god of seamen.

Accordingly, when the first of the Ptolemies was forming his various plans for adorning and aggrandizing Alexandria, he received, he said, one night, a divine intimation in a dream that he was to obtain the statue of Serapis from Sinope, and set it up in Alexandria, in a suitable temple which he was in the mean

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<sup>2</sup> See map; frontispiece.

time to erect in honor of the god. It is obvious that very great advantages to the city would result from the accomplishment of this design. In the first place, a temple to the god Serapis would be a new distinction for it in the minds of the rural population, who would undoubtedly suppose that the deity honored by it was their own ancient god. Then the whole maritime and nautical interest of the world, which had been accustomed to adore the god of Sinope, would turn to Alexandria as the great center of religious attraction, if their venerated idol could be carried and placed in a new and magnificent temple built expressly for him there. Alexandria could never be the chief naval port and station of the world, unless it contained the sanctuary and shrine of the god of seamen.

Ptolemy sent accordingly to the King of Sinope and proposed to purchase the idol. The embassy was, however, unsuccessful. The king refused to give up the god. The negotiations were continued for two years, but all in vain. At length, on account of some failure in the regular course of the seasons on that coast, there was a famine there, which became finally so severe that the people of the city were induced to consent to give up their deity to the Egyptians in exchange for a supply of corn. Ptolemy sent the corn and received the idol. He then built the temple, which, when finished, surpassed in grandeur and magnificence almost every sacred structure in the world.

It was in this temple that the successive additions to the Alexandrian library were deposited, when the apartments at

the Museum became full. In the end there were four hundred thousand rolls or volumes in the Museum, and three hundred thousand in the Serapion. The former was called the parent library, and the latter, being, as it were, the offspring of the first, was called the daughter.

Ptolemy Philadelphus, who interested himself very greatly in collecting this library, wished to make it a complete collection of all the books in the world. He employed scholars to read and study, and travelers to make extensive tours, for the purpose of learning what books existed among all the surrounding nations; and, when he learned of their existence, he spared no pains or expense in attempting to procure either the originals themselves, or the most perfect and authentic copies of them. He sent to Athens and obtained the works of the most celebrated Greek historians, and then causing, as in other cases, most beautiful transcripts to be made, he sent the transcripts back to Athens, and a very large sum of money with them as an equivalent for the difference of value between originals and copies in such an exchange.

In the course of the inquiries which Ptolemy made into the literature of the surrounding nations, in his search for accessions to his library, he heard that the Jews had certain sacred writings in their temple at Jerusalem, comprising a minute and extremely interesting history of their nation from the earliest periods, and also many other books of sacred prophecy and poetry. These books, which were, in fact, the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old

Testament, were then wholly unknown to all nations except the Jews, and among the Jews were known only to priests and scholars. They were kept sacred at Jerusalem. The Jews would have considered them as profaned in being exhibited to the view of pagan nations. In fact, the learned men of other countries would not have been able to read them; for the Jews secluded themselves so closely from the rest of mankind, that their language was, in that age, scarcely ever heard beyond the confines of Judea and Galilee.

Ptolemy very naturally thought that a copy of these sacred books would be a great acquisition to his library. They constituted, in fact, the whole literature of a nation which was, in some respects, the most extraordinary that ever existed on the globe. Ptolemy conceived the idea, also, of not only adding to his library a copy of these writings in the original Hebrew, but of causing a translation of them to be made into Greek, so that they might easily be read by the Greek and Roman scholars who were drawn in great numbers to his capital by the libraries and the learned institutions which he had established there. The first thing to be effected, however, in accomplishing either of these plans, was to obtain the consent of the Jewish authorities. They would probably object to giving up any copy of their sacred writings at all.

There was one circumstance which led Ptolemy to imagine that the Jews would, at that time particularly, be averse to granting any request of such a nature coming from an Egyptian

king, and that was, that during certain wars which had taken place in previous reigns, a considerable number of prisoners had been taken by the Egyptians, and had been brought to Egypt as captives, where they had been sold to the inhabitants, and were now scattered over the land as slaves. They were employed as servile laborers in tilling the fields, or in turning enormous wheels to pump up water from the Nile. The masters of these hapless bondmen conceived, like other slave-holders, that they had a right of property in their slaves. This was in some respects true, since they had bought them of the government at the close of the war for a consideration; and though they obviously derived from this circumstance no valid proprietary right or claim as against the men personally, it certainly would seem that it gave them a just claim against the government of whom they bought, in case of subsequent manumission.

Ptolemy or his minister, for it can not now be known who was the real actor in these transactions, determined on liberating these slaves and sending them back to their native land, as a means of propitiating the Jews and inclining them to listen favorably to the request which he was about to prefer for a copy of their sacred writings. He, however, paid to those who held the captives a very liberal sum for ransom. The ancient historians, who never allow the interest of their narratives to suffer for want of a proper amplification on their part of the scale on which the deeds which they record were performed, say that the number of slaves liberated on this occasion was a hundred and twenty

thousand, and the sum paid for them, as compensation to the owners, was six hundred talents, equal to six hundred thousand dollars.<sup>3</sup> And yet this was only a preliminary expense to pave the way for the acquisition of a single series of books, to add to the variety of the immense collection.

After the liberation and return of the captives, Ptolemy sent a splendid embassy to Jerusalem, with very respectful letters to the high priest, and with very magnificent presents. The ambassadors were received with the highest honors. The request of Ptolemy that he should be allowed to take a copy of the sacred books for his library was very readily granted.

The priests caused copies to be made of all the sacred writings. These copies were executed in the most magnificent style, and were splendidly illuminated with letters of gold. The Jewish government also, at Ptolemy's request, designated a company of Hebrew scholars, six from each tribe – men learned in both the Greek and Hebrew languages – to proceed to Alexandria, and there, at the Museum, to make a careful translation of the Hebrew books into Greek. As there were twelve tribes, and six translators chosen from each, there were seventy-two translators in all. They made their translation, and it was called the *Septuagint*, from the Latin *septuaginta duo*, which means seventy-two.

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<sup>3</sup> It will be sufficiently accurate for the general reader of history to consider the Greek talent, referred to in such transactions as these, as equal in English money to two hundred and fifty pounds, in American to a thousand dollars. It is curious to observe that, large as the total was that was paid for the liberation of these slaves, the amount paid for each individual was, after all, only a sum equal to about five dollars.

Although out of Judea there was no feeling of reverence for these Hebrew Scriptures as books of divine authority, there was still a strong interest felt in them as very entertaining and curious works of history, by all the Greek and Roman scholars who frequented Alexandria to study at the Museum. Copies were accordingly made of the Septuagint translation, and were taken to other countries; and there, in process of time, copies of the copies were made, until, at length the work became extensively circulated throughout the whole learned world. When, finally, Christianity became extended over the Roman empire, the priests and monks looked with even a stronger interest than the ancient scholars had felt upon this early translation of so important a portion of the sacred Scriptures. They made new copies for abbeys, monasteries, and colleges; and when, at length, the art of printing was discovered, this work was one of the first on which the magic power of typography was tried. The original manuscript made by the scribes of the seventy-two, and all the early transcripts which were made from it, have long since been lost or destroyed; but, instead of them, we have now hundreds of thousands of copies in compact printed volumes, scattered among the public and private libraries of Christendom. In fact, now, after the lapse of two thousand years, a copy of Ptolemy's Septuagint may be obtained of any considerable bookseller in any country of the civilized world; and though it required a national embassy, and an expenditure, if the accounts are true, of more than a million of dollars, originally to obtain it, it may



be procured without difficulty now by two days' wages of an ordinary laborer.

Besides the building of the Pharos, the Museum, and the Temple of Serapis, the early Ptolemies formed and executed a great many other plans tending to the same ends which the erection of these splendid edifices was designed to secure, namely, to concentrate in Alexandria all possible means of attraction, commercial, literary, and religious, so as to make the city the great center of interest, and the common resort for all mankind. They raised immense revenues for these and other purposes by taxing heavily the whole agricultural produce of the valley of the Nile. The inundations, by the boundless fertility which they annually produced, supplied the royal treasuries. Thus the Abyssinian rains at the sources of the Nile built the Pharos at its mouth, and endowed the Alexandrian library.

The taxes laid upon the people of Egypt to supply the Ptolemies with funds were, in fact, so heavy, that only the bare means of subsistence were left to the mass of the agricultural population. In admiring the greatness and glory of the city, therefore, we must remember that there was a gloomy counterpart to its splendor in the very extended destitution and poverty to which the mass of the people were every where doomed. They lived in hamlets of wretched huts along the banks of the river, in order that the capital might be splendidly adorned with temples and palaces. They passed their lives in darkness and ignorance, that seven hundred thousand volumes

of expensive manuscripts might be enrolled at the Museum for the use of foreign philosophers and scholars. The policy of the Ptolemies was, perhaps, on the whole, the best, for the general advancement and ultimate welfare of mankind, which could have been pursued in the age in which they lived and acted; but, in applauding the results which they attained, we must not wholly forget the cost which they incurred in attaining them. At the same cost, we could, at the present day, far surpass them. If the people of the United States will surrender the comforts and conveniences which they individually enjoy – if the farmers scattered in their comfortable homes on the hill-sides and plains throughout the land will give up their houses, their furniture, their carpets, their books, and the privileges of their children, and then – withholding from the produce of their annual toil only a sufficient reservation to sustain them and their families through the year, in a life like that of a beast of burden, spent in some miserable and naked hovel – send the rest to some hereditary sovereign residing upon the Atlantic sea-board, that he may build with the proceeds a splendid capital, they may have an Alexandria now that will infinitely exceed the ancient city of the Ptolemies in splendor and renown. The nation, too, would, in such a case, pay for its metropolis the same price, precisely, that the ancient Egyptians paid for theirs.

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