

Mitton Geraldine Edith

Round the Wonderful World



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Mitton G. E.
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TO

JIM

CHAPTER I WHICH WAY?

When you have noticed a fly crawling on a ball or an orange has it ever occurred to you how a man would look crawling about on the earth if seen from a great height? Our world is, as everyone knows, like an orange in shape, only it is very much larger in comparison with us than an orange is in regard to a fly. In fact, to make a reasonable comparison, we should have to picture the fly crawling about on a ball or globe fifty miles in height; to get all round it he would have to make a journey of something like one hundred and fifty miles. It would take a determined fly to accomplish that! Yet we little human beings often start off on a journey round the world quite cheerfully, and it is more difficult for us than for the imaginary fly, because the globe is not a smooth surface of dry land, but is made up of jungles and deserts and forests and oceans. There are some places where people can do nothing in the heat of the day, and others where their flesh freezes like cold white marble in a moment if they don't take precautions.

To set out on foot around such a world would be folly, and man has invented all sorts of ingenious machines to carry him, – trains and steamers, for instance, – and with their help he can do the journey in a reasonable time. It costs money, of course, but it is a glorious enterprise.

Here, in our own homes, we see pretty much the same things every day – green fields and trees, cows and sheep and horses, if we live in the country; and houses and streets and vehicles, if we live in the town. Everyone we meet speaks the same language; even if we were to go up to a stranger to ask a question we are tolerably sure that he would understand us and answer politely. We have cold days and warm ones, but the sun is never too hot for us to go out in the middle of the day, and the cold never so intense as to freeze our noses and make them fall off. The houses are all built in much the same way; people dress alike and look alike. Someone catches me up there, "Indeed they don't; some are pretty and some are ugly and everyone is different!"

Yes, you think that now, but wait until you have travelled a bit, and seen some of the races which really *are* different from ours, then you'll think that not only are British people alike, but that even all Europeans are more or less so.

You are not likely to travel? Well, I'm not so sure of that, for I'm going to offer to take you, and, what is more, you need not bother your head about expenses, and we will have all the time we want. I am going to carry you away with me in this book to see the marvels of other lands; lands where the burning sun strikes down on our own countrymen wearing white helmets on their heads and suits of snowy white as they walk about amid brown-skinned natives whose bare bodies gleam like satin, lands where lines of palm trees wave their long fronds over the pearly surf washing at their roots. We will visit also other lands where you look out over a glowing pink and mauve desert to seeming infinity, and see reflected in bitter shallow water at your feet the flames of such a sunset glory as you never yet have imagined. Or you can ride out across the same desert lying white as snow beneath a moon far larger and more glistening than any you ever see here. You shall watch volcanoes shooting out columns of fire which roll down toward the villages nestling in their vineyards below, and you shall gaze at mountains which raise their stately heads far up into the silent region of eternal snow. You shall see the steel-blue waves rising in great heaps with the swell of an unquiet sea. You shall talk to the mischievous little Burmese women and watch them kneeling before their pagodas of pure gold, and shall visit the little Japs making merry in their paper houses; you shall find the last representatives of the grand races of North American Indians in their wigwams. And these are only a very few of the wonders of the world.

Where shall we begin? That requires some consideration. As the world is not a solid block of level ground we shall have to choose our track as best we can along the routes that are most convenient,

and we can't certainly go right round in one straight line as if we followed a piece of string tied round the middle of the earth. Of course we shall have to start from England, and we shall be wisest to turn eastward first, coming back again from the west. The eastern part is the Old World, and the western the New World, of which the existence was not known until centuries later. It is natural, therefore, to begin with the older part first. If we do this we must start in the autumn so as to arrive at some of the hottest countries in what is their winter, for the summer is unbearable to Europeans. So much is easily settled.

Have you ever realised that Great Britain is an island? I hear someone say "Silly!" under their breath; it does seem an absurd question, for surely every baby knows that! Well, of course even the smallest children have been told so, directly they begin to learn anything, but to *realise* it is a different matter. An island is surrounded by water, and none of us have ever sailed round our own country and made the experiment of seeing for ourselves that it is so. You have been to the sea certainly, and seen the edge of our island home, but have you ever thought of that long line which runs away and away from your seaside place? Have you followed the smooth sandy bays and the outlines of the towering cliffs; have you passed the mouths of mighty rivers and so gone steadily on northward to the bleak coasts of Scotland where the waves beat on granite cliffs; have you rounded stormy Cape Wrath, and sailed in and out by all the deep-cut inlets on the west of Scotland, and thus come back to the very place from whence you started? If you can even imagine this it gives you some idea of what being an island means. We are on every side surrounded by water, and nowhere can we get away to any other country without crossing the sea.

The very nearest country to us is France, and at the narrowest point of the Channel there are only twenty-one miles of sea to get over. One way of starting on our great enterprise is to cross this little strip of water and take the train across France, right to the other side, there to meet a ship which will carry us onward. Or we can start in the same way across the Channel but go much farther on by train, all along Italy as well as France, and then we can catch the same ship a considerable way farther on in the Mediterranean.

Or there is another way, the quickest of all, and the newest; by this means – after crossing the Channel – we can go the whole distance across Europe, and Asia too, by train, and come out on the other side of the world, near China, in about ten days! To do this we should have to get to Russia first by any European line we pleased, and on arriving at the town of Moscow change into the train which does this mighty journey. It starts once a week, and is called The International. It is quite a small train, though the engine is large. There are only half a dozen coaches, and one of these is for luggage and another is a restaurant. First-class people are put two together into a compartment. It certainly sounds as if that would allow plenty of room, but then if anyone has to live and sleep and move for ten days in a train, he can hardly be expected to sit cramped up all the time, he must have some space to stir about in. At night one of the seats forms one bed and another is let down crossways above it. There is, alas, no bath, but there is a small lavatory for every two compartments where we can wash after a fashion. There are even books provided in the restaurant car, some in Russian, some in French, some in German, and some in English.

The journey itself is not very interesting, and we should be glad enough to get to the end of it I fancy. No, I am not going to allow you to take me that way, not even if you begged hard! It is very useful for business men, whose one idea is to save time, but for us who want to see all we can of this glorious world it would be folly.

On the contrary, the route I should like to take is the very longest of all, and that is by sea the whole way, on one of the great liners running east. The real choice lies between this and the railway journey across France to the seaport of Marseilles, or Toulon, according to which of the great British lines of steamships we choose – the Peninsula and Oriental, known as the P. & O., or the Orient. I am willing you should decide between these routes. Think well. In order that you may understand better what the choice means I will tell you what you will see if we take the railway journey.

We shall have to start one morning from Charing Cross Station in London. All around us people are carrying bundles of rugs and magazines. Some, like ourselves, are going far east and they are parting from those who love them and will not see them again for a long time. That fair young man standing by the carriage door looks little more than a big schoolboy, but he is going out to India to help to govern there. He is a clever fellow and has passed a very stiff examination to gain this position, and he eagerly looks forward to all the new scenes in the life awaiting him. His charming mother and sister are seeing him off; they are so much alike they might be mistaken for sisters; they are trying to talk and joke lightly, but you can see how hungrily the mother's eyes are fastened on her son, as if she could never see him enough. Rightly too, for when she meets him again, he will not be the boy he is now. His face will be browned by the tropical sun, and he will have become a man; he will have an air of command which comes naturally to a man who lives, often by himself, in charge of a district, and has to rule and judge and decide for the dark-skinned people.

Close beside us there are several men smoking big cigars, and one of them says loudly, "All right, old chap, I'll bring one back for you next week; I shall cross again on Monday." He runs over to Paris on business every week and thinks no more of it than of going to his office in the morning. A trip to France is very easy when you have the means to do it comfortably.

Then we take our seats, and the train steams out of the station, leaving the crowd on the platform to scatter. After a long run, with no stops, we reach Dover and go on board a steamer which seems quite large enough to anyone who is not used to steamers. Our heavy luggage has been sent on board the big ship which will meet us at Marseilles, so we have only our handbags to carry. The crossing is quite short, and it is best to stay on deck if you don't want to be ill. The very first thing to notice, as we gradually draw away from the land, is the whiteness of the towering chalk cliffs which stand out prominently near Dover. Often you must have read of the "white cliffs of Old Albion," and if you live in the north or away from the sea, you must have wondered what they were; now this explains it all. When the Romans came over from the Continent they crossed the sea the shortest way, and in approaching this unknown island were struck with astonishment at the high gleaming white cliffs, unlike anything they had seen before; they were so much amazed that ever after the "white cliffs" were the chief feature of Britain in their eyes.

There is a break in the cliffs, where Dover now stands, and here the Romans later on made a port, and a port it has remained to this day.

If we are lucky in getting a fine day for the crossing we can sit on deck-chairs, looking at the dazzling milky-blue sea and sky until someone cries out, "There's France!"

You will not be able to make out anything at all at first, because land does not look in the least what you expect when you see it first from the sea. You would naturally search for a long dark line low down on the horizon, but it isn't like that at all. There is a hazy bluish cloud, very indistinct, and seemingly transparent, but as we draw nearer it grows clearer, and then houses and ships can be discerned, and after a good deal of manœuvring and shouting and throwing of ropes and churning up the water with the screw, two bridges are pushed across to the dock, and numbers of eager little porters, dressed in bright blue linen suits with very baggy trousers, surround us and implore us to allow them to carry our baggage.

"Me Engleesh speaking, sir."

"Good me, good man me."

"Baggage carrying me."

They are here, there, and everywhere, so good-natured, so lively, so different from the stolid English porters. Their eyes are very bright and they will take money of any kind, French or English, it matters not to them.

We have had to get our money changed on the boat, and that is the first thing that makes us feel we are really out of England. In exchange for an English gold pound we get twenty-five – not twenty – French shillings; these shillings are called francs and are not unlike our shillings at a first

glance, but they are thinner and lighter. Some have the head of Napoleon, the last French Emperor, on them – these are old; the latest new ones are rather interesting, for they have a little olive branch on one side and a graceful figure of a woman sowing seed on the other, so one can interpret the meaning as peace and plenty. If you change a franc into copper you get ten – not twelve – pennies for it, and French pennies look very much like those of England. There are also half-franc pieces like little sixpences, and two-franc pieces like smaller florins, and gold pounds called Louis or Napoleons, and half-sovereigns too, but all the money seems light and rather unreal when one is accustomed to our more solid coins.

We walk up the gangway into a large barn-like place, where we meet some smart-looking men in uniform with pointed moustaches turned up to their eyes and a fierce expression. They stand behind a shelf, on which all the baggage from the boat is put, and we approach this with our bags in our hands.

The official demands in French if we have anything to declare, meaning, are we bringing across anything which it is forbidden to sell in France, such as brandy, matches, or cigarettes, for if so we must declare it and pay something to the Government for allowing us to bring it. We answer that we have nothing. "Rien, Monsieur," very politely, hoping to soften his heart, and as we both have honest faces he believes us and scrawls a chalk-mark on our bags and lets us pass. We are lucky, for now we can go straight on to the train and get good places before the crowd follows. Some unfortunate people, however, are caught. One woman who is wearing a hat with enormous feathers and very high-heeled shoes, has two huge trunks.

She tries to slip a five-franc piece into the hand of one of the custom-house officers. It is a silly thing to do, for it at once makes him think she is concealing something; very loudly and virtuously he refuses the money, hoping that everyone notices how upright he is, and then he insists on the contents of her trunks being turned out on to the counter. Piles of beautiful underclothing are spread out before all those men; silk and satin frocks come next; numberless dressing-table ornaments in silver and gold, and little bottles by the dozen; boots and shoes and books follow, while Madame begins to weep and then changes to screaming and raving. She is a Frenchwoman who has been staying in England, but she did not escape any more than an English-woman. How she will ever manage to get all her finery stuffed back into those boxes without ruining it I don't know, and we haven't time to wait to see.

The platform is very low and the train looks in consequence much larger than an English one, as we have to climb up into it almost from the ground. It is a corridor train, and the first classes are lined with a kind of drab cloth, which does not seem so suitable for railway work as our dark blue colour. The guard sets us off with a little "brr-r-r" like a toy cock crowing. When we move out of the station at last we find ourselves going at a snail's pace along a street, and at once we catch our breath with interest – it is all so strange! Never will you forget that first glimpse of a foreign land! The very air is different, with a sharp pleasant smell of wood-smoke in it. Some people say that every foreign country has its own smell and that they would know where they were with their eyes shut! This must be an exaggeration, still there is something in it!

As the train goes slowly forward a clanging bell rings on the engine to warn the people to get off the lines, which are not fenced in in any way. On every side you see neat little women wearing no hats, with their hair done up in top-knots; they are out marketing, and most of them carry immense baskets or string-bags stuffed with cabbages and carrots and other vegetables. The children are nearly all dark, with brown skins and bright black eyes, and they look thin but full of life. The boys wear a long pinafore or overall of cheap black stuff, and even the biggest go about in short socks, showing their bare legs, which looks rather babyish to us. The sun is shining brilliantly, and on most of the pavements there are chairs set out around small tables where men in perfectly amazingly baggy corduroy trousers and blue blouses sit and drink variously coloured drinks. A little boy who was too near the line is caught away by his agitated mother, who pours out over him a babble of words, and the child, laughing roguishly, answers her as volubly. Not one sentence, not one word, can we understand, though we are quite near and can hear it all. When you remember the painfully slow way you have learnt *avoir*

and *être* at school it is maddening to think that this child, much younger than you, can rattle away in French without any trouble, and it is still more annoying that when you *did* think you knew a little French you cannot make out one single word! French spoken is so very different from French learnt out of a book! However, for your comfort you must remember that that little bright-eyed boy, whose name is probably Pierre or Jacques, would think you very clever indeed to be able to talk in English.

The houses have a strange look; it is chiefly because every single one of them, even the poorest, has sun-shutters outside the windows, set back against the wall; they are of wood, mostly painted green and pierced with slits. In countries where the sun is hot and strong at midday the rooms must be kept cool by such shutters.

When we are once clear of the town the train soon gets up great speed, and we race through green fields with hedgerows and trees as in our own land, and yet even here there is something different. It may be because of the long lines of poplars, like "Noah's Ark" trees, which appear very frequently, or it may be the country houses we see here and there, which are more "Noah's Ark" still, being built very stiffly and painted in bright reds and yellows and greens that look like streaks. At the level crossings you see women standing holding a red flag furled, for women seem to do as much of the work on the railways as men; and waiting at the gates there is often a team of three or four horses, each decorated with an immense sheep-skin collar, that looks as if it must be most hot and uncomfortable. Occasionally we catch sight of what looks like a rookery in the trees seen against the sky; however, the dark bunches are not nests at all, but lumps of mistletoe growing freely. Rather a fairytale sort of country where mistletoe can be got so easily!

We can stay all night in Paris if we like, and travel the next day to Marseilles, and stay a night there too. That is doing the journey easily. Many people go right through, running round Paris in a special train and being carried speeding through France all night. There are sleeping cars made up like little cabins with beds in them and every luxury. But it is tiring to travel on continuously in a French train, as the carriages are made very hot by steam, and French people object to having the windows open at all, so the atmosphere gets almost unbearable, according to our ideas.

We shan't have time to see much of Paris if we just stay the night there, but as we drive through in a taxi-cab we can see how full of life it is, though at this time of the year people do not sit out at the little tables on the pavements late in the evening as they do in the summer. There are taxi-cabs everywhere, and they all pass each other on the right side, you notice, the opposite side from that which we use; you will find this in all other foreign countries but Sweden, and in some Provinces of Austria. Though Great Britain stands almost alone, in this case she is certainly in the right, for the driver ought to be on the side near the vehicle he is passing, and also the whip coming in the middle of the street is less liable to flick anyone than if it was on the pavement side.

The hotels in Paris are many and magnificent; when we arrive at one all gilt and glitter, we ask for small rooms, as it is only for one night, and are taken up to two tiny apartments simply crammed with furniture. It is enough to make anyone laugh, for there is hardly room to turn round. Both are alike. In each the bed is covered with a magnificent yellow satin brocade coverlet; there is a large arm-chair, which quite prevents the door of the huge wardrobe from opening. The washing-stand, which has taps of hot and cold water, is crammed into a corner so that one can hardly get at it. There is a writing-table with ink and blotting-pad and everything else for writing, but no dressing-table and nowhere at all to put one's brushes. Above the mantelpiece is a big mirror, too high for you to look into, though I can peer round that immense gilt clock to do my shaving. The rest of the mantelpiece is taken up with heavy marble ornaments – utterly useless – and gilt candlesticks. There is a telephone on the wall, and down this we can give our orders into the hall. Luckily I know enough French to ask for what we want, though if you stand giggling at me every word will go out of my head when the man below inquires my wishes.

It is by means of this telephone I order breakfast for us both to be sent up next morning. All we can get is coffee, or tea, with rolls and butter and two poached or boiled eggs. You'll have to make

this do. It is the custom here. In France people start with only coffee and rolls and then go off and do a good morning's work, and come back again to eat a large meal which is a sort of breakfast and lunch rolled into one, at about twelve o'clock. It all depends on what one is accustomed to, and certainly we look very hungrily at the small dish of eggs that appears!

Meantime I am getting a little anxious about my boots. I put them out last night to be cleaned, but this is such a large place, with so many people coming and going, that I began to wonder if they have been taken to the wrong room; timidly I ask the waiter, who brings the breakfast, if he can find them. With a knowing smile he stoops down and opens a tiny cupboard in the wall near the door, and there, slipped in from outside, are the boots! "Voilà!" he says triumphantly, as if he had just brought off a successful conjuring trick. Certainly what with the taps and telephone and trap-doors for boots this hotel is very much up to date.

North of Paris we have seen orchards of apple and cherry trees, but farther south, as we rush along, we get into a land of vineyards, where rows of little vines are being cultivated on every foot of ground on the hillsides. By nightfall we reach Marseilles, and if we were going on to Toulon it would have taken two hours more.

Marseilles is the largest seaport in France, and is second only to Paris in size and importance.

Do you know those preserved fruits which generally appear about Christmas-time in oval cardboard or long wooden boxes? Have you ever wondered if they are real fruit, and where they come from? They *are* real fruit, boiled and dipped in syrup, though they taste very different from the same fruit freshly gathered. A great deal of the preserving is done in France, especially along the south coast, and when we get to Marseilles we are in the very heart of the business.

After passing the night in an hotel we have time to wander about a bit before going down to the docks to find our ship.

The sun is shining brightly as we turn out after another breakfast, which only seems to have given an edge to our keen British appetites. There is a nasty cold wind blowing round corners and buffeting people. The pavements are very lively; we see women and girls hurrying about doing household shopping, and boys in heavy cloth capes and military caps, so that they look like cadets, this is the uniform worn by better-class schoolboys in France. The French policemen, called gendarmes, are also in uniform of so military a kind that unless we knew we should certainly mistake them for soldiers.

There are stalls set out on the pavements, heaped up with embroidery and odds and ends, including soap, which is manufactured here very largely. Bright-eyed girls try to entice us to buy as we pass. One street is just like a flower garden, lined with stalls piled up with violets and roses and anemones and other blossoms. Trams follow one another along the rails in an endless procession. We walk on briskly and turn down a side street; here at last is what I have been looking for, and well worth finding it is too! It is a shop with great plate-glass windows; on one side is every kind of preserved fruit, and on the other a variety of chocolates, tarts, and expensive sweets. Look at that dainty box filled with dark green figs, artistically set off by sugared violets pressed into all the niches! These are rather different from the flat, dry brown figs which is all that English children recognise under that name. Another box glows with tiny oranges, mandarins they call them here, and piled up over them are richly coloured cherries shining with sugar crystals. In the centre is an enormous fruit like a dark orange-coloured melon, surrounded by heaps of others, while the plain brown chestnuts, that don't attract much notice, are really the best of all, for they are the *marrons glacés* for which Marseilles is famed, and once you have tasted these, freshly made, all other sweets will seem insipid to you.

Inside the shop there are many carefully dressed ladies, daintily holding little plates, and going about from one counter to another, picking up little cakes filled with cream and soaked in syrup. They eat scores of them, and they do it every day and any hour of the day, in the morning or afternoon or whenever they happen to pass. No wonder they look pasty-faced! We are only here for once, so we need have no compunction about our digestions, especially as there is an empty place left after that

tantalising bacon-less breakfast. We are soon provided with a plate each and a little implement which looks as if it had started life as a butter-knife and suddenly changed its mind to become a fork.

The shop-girls take no notice of what we eat; we can pick and choose freely, and at the end they trust us to say how many cakes we have had. We can get here also cups of thick rich chocolate, and, if we wanted it, some tea, though it is only of late years that French people have taken to drinking tea at all freely, for coffee is their national beverage.

Well, come along, tear yourself away, we must get a cab and go down to our ship which is at the docks.

In the cab we pass what is called the Old Port with picturesque rows of weather-beaten sailing boats; only the sailing boats are allowed to come in here. Rising up against the sky at the far end of the port is a curious bridge quite unlike any other you have seen, for the bridge part is at a great height and there is nothing below by which people or vehicles can cross over. How is anyone going to take the trouble to climb up there? How, above all, are carts or carriages going to manage it?

You can easily make a rough model to see the principle of this bridge for yourself. Get a couple of the tallest candlesticks in the house, and put a stick across them, run a curtain ring on to the stick, and to the ring attach numerous threads fastened at the lower end to a flat bit of card or board like a raft. Then, by pushing the ring along the stick, you can make the raft follow across below. The stick represents the high bridge, and the raft in reality rests on the surface of the water, and when the machinery above, represented by the ring, is set in motion, it rumbles across and draws with it the floating raft, which is large enough to take a great number of men and vehicles. Every ten minutes or so this floating bridge passes over from one side to another, and people pay a sou, which is the French halfpenny, to travel with it. Thus, you see, when a tall ship comes in she has only to avoid the raft, and she can sail in beneath the high bridge without any trouble. We could, if we wished, go up in a lift to the high bridge; but the railings up there are far apart, and there is a high wind blowing, you are not very big, and if you slipped between I should have to give up my voyage round the world; so I think we won't, if you don't mind!

Besides, we have to catch our ship waiting at the docks, and she will be off very soon.

Now that you have heard what we should probably do and see if we went across France, will you take this journey or will you start from England and go right round in the ship?

You answer that though you would like to see the little blue-bloused porters, and that it would amuse you to think that the little French boys and girls could speak no English, and though you would certainly *love* the *marrons glacés*, you think, after all, having heard about it, we might just as well go the other way round, though, of course – the *marrons glacés*—

Sensible boy! Forget about them! We'll go round. In the very next chapter we'll be up and off in earnest.

CHAPTER II

REALLY OFF!

It is exciting to start on any journey, even if it is only one we have done before, but to go off round the world that is a real adventure!

There are many lines of steamers we could choose to go by, but we will select for this first part of the journey the Orient Line. The choice really lies between that and the P. & O., as we have already decided, and for many reasons it is best to begin with the Orient and join the other later. The main reason being that I want you to see a little of as many European countries as possible, and the Orient ships stop at Naples, in Italy, while those of the other line do not.

The ships in the Orient fleet all begin with an O; there are the *Otranto*, *Otway*, and many more, but the boat which suits us and happens to sail on the date we want to start – in the beginning of November – is the *Orontes*. She is not the largest ship in the fleet, having about half a dozen before her on the list, but she is a good ship and very steady.

Our jumping-off place is London, whence a special train runs from the station of St. Pancras down to the docks at Tilbury, where the *Orontes* is waiting for us. The long platform beside the train is covered with people when we arrive there, so that we have some difficulty in finding seats. If all these people were coming with us we should have a full ship indeed, but the one half of them is only seeing the other half off!

The line passes through dreary flat country, and at last we catch sight of open water and funnels and feel as if we must be right down at the Thames' mouth, but we are very far from that yet.

The heavy luggage has all been sent on ahead, and passengers are told only to bring with them what can be carried in the hand; judging from the piles of boxes that are tumbled out of the train many of them must have tolerably large hands!

We pass through a great shed, and coming out on the other side find our ship there, right up against the dock side. It towers above us, blocking out the sky as a street of six-storey houses would do. In fact, it is rather like looking up at a street side, and when we see the sloping ladder leading to the deck, like those used for hen-roosts but on a giant scale, we feel our adventure is well begun. Hang on to the hand-rail, for the wind is blowing hard, and if you went down into the black dirty water between the ship and the dock there would be very little chance of getting you out again; even as we climb up something flicks past us and is carried away, and we see it floating far below; it is an enormous white handkerchief which the man up there on deck has been waving to his wife in farewell. It is gone, and it is to be hoped he has another handy, he'll need it to-day. At the top of the ladder a man in uniform looks at our ticket and calls out the number of our cabin. He is so smart and has such a dignified manner we might well mistake him for the captain, but he is an officer, called the purser, who looks after the passengers. A bright-faced steward, unmistakably English, takes possession of us and pilots us down some well-carpeted stairs, through a large room where small tables are laid for lunch, and into a very long narrow passage shining with white enamel paint. There are little doors with numbers on them on one side, and about half-way along the steward stops and ushers us into our cabin. It is a tiny room. If you lay down from side to side you could touch each wall with head and heels, and if I lay down from end to end I could do the same, and I am rather bigger than you! There are two shelves, one above the other, made up as beds, a piece of furniture with drawers and a looking-glass in it, a fixed basin such as those you see in bathrooms, and a few pegs to hang things on, and that is all. Our cabin trunks, which we sent on ahead, are here before us, and through the open round port-hole we catch a glimpse of grey water. We are lucky indeed to get a cabin to ourselves, for in many, not a bit larger than this, there would be a third bunk or bed, and a stranger would be forced in on us. When we have settled our things you will be surprised to find how comfortable it all

is, for everything is so conveniently arranged. It is just as well to put out what we shall want at once while the ship is steady, for once she begins to roll —

When we have done this we go back to the saloon, encountering many people rushing wildly to and fro with bags and bundles, still unable to find their cabins, having come on at the last minute. In the great saloon, those who are going ashore are hastily swallowing cups of hot tea, and just as we arrive a bell rings to warn them to get off the ship if they don't want to be carried away with her.

They flock down the gangway while we stand high above, and many good-byes are shouted, and some are tearful and some are quite casual and cheerful. Then the gangway is moved, but just before it goes down with a run there is a shout, and two policemen hurry along the quay hauling two shamefaced-looking men who are hustled up into the ship again. They are stokers who fire the furnaces for the engines far down below in the bowels of the ship. They had signed on for this voyage and at the last minute tried to slink away, but have been caught and forced back to their work.

Now the strip of water widens and very slowly we move from the quay, being dragged ignominiously backward across the great basin in which we lie by a diminutive steamer called a tug. We are not out in the river yet and our own engines have not begun to work. You can understand that it would be very difficult to load a ship if she stood always in the river, where there are rising and falling tides, so, to make this easier, great docks have been built along the river, and in them the flow of the tides is regulated, so that the water remains always at pretty much the same level.

The tug that pulls us across the dock on our way out looks absurdly small, like a little Spitz dog pulling a great deerhound; but it does its work well, and presently we glide into a narrow cut between high walls; this is the lock, the entrance to the dock, and the water is held up by great gates at each end as required, just as it is on river locks for boats. Once we are inside the great gates behind us are shut, and presently those at the farther end open and we see two other little tugs waiting there to take us in charge. We are going out at the top of the tide, and if we missed it should have to wait for another twelve hours, or there would not be sufficient water in the river to float the ship comfortably. We are still stern first, so if we want to see the fun we must climb up to the top deck at that end. The wind is blowing a perfect gale and almost drives us off our feet; it catches the side of the ship and makes it far harder work for the gallant grimy tugs, which are pulling and straining at the taut ropes till they look like bars of iron lying between us and them. They churn the water to a fury, and pour forth volumes of black smoke; inch by inch we feel the ship moving out; her stern is dragged upstream, so that when she is finally swung clear, her bows are pointing seaward and she is ready to go. It is an exciting moment when the ropes are cast off, and there is a great deal of running about and shouting, and then our own engines begin gently but powerfully to do their work. The screws beneath the stern revolve and we have started on our long, long voyage!

There are no waves in the river; only those who are very nervous will think about being ill yet awhile, and this is a good chance to examine the great ship which is to be our home for some time.

There is plenty of room to walk about on the decks or to play games when we reach a more summer-like climate. There are many rooms where we can shelter in the wet and cold weather, a great lounge with writing-tables, and a smoking-room – and there is no house on earth kept so spotlessly clean as a ship!

When we go down to dinner we sit on chairs that swing round like office chairs, only they are fixed into the floor, and as they only swing one way, there are some funny scenes till people get used to them. We have hardly taken our seats when a very magnificent man with a white waistcoat and gold shoulder straps and much gold lace on his uniform comes and sits down too, and smiles and bows to everyone. This is the captain, and we must be more distinguished than we guessed, for we have been put at his table, where the honoured passengers usually find seats. Though this captain has such a kindly smile, a captain can be very terrifying indeed; he is king in his ship, and has absolute authority; his word is law, as, of course, it must be, for the safety of the whole ship's company depends on him, and there is the fine tradition, which British captains always live up to, that in case of any

accident happening to the ship the captain must be the last man to quit her. Innumerable captains indeed have preferred to go down into the unfathomable depths with their ships sooner than leave them when they have been wrecked.

For several days there are very few people to be seen about, and the rows of empty chairs at the table and on deck are rather depressing, but as the weather brightens a little people creep out of their cabins; white-faced ladies come to lie, rolled in rugs, on the sheltered side of the deck, and the chairs are filled. Yet it is still a little dismal, though we tramp sturdily up and down and would not admit it for the world. The strong wind blows endlessly and the great grey waves are always rolling on monotonously one after another, one after another, in huge hillocks. So we plough down the English Channel and across the Bay of Biscay, which is no rougher than anywhere else, though people ask with bated breath, "When shall we be in the Bay?" "Are we through the Bay yet?" as if there was no other bay in all the world.

Then comes a day when all at once everyone on board seems to wake up and become alive again. The sun shines in patches along the decks and the sea is blue and sparkling. We are passing close beside a steep and rocky coast, and so near do we go that we can see the white waves dashing against it and even spouting up in sheets of spray through blow-holes in the cliffs. What we see is the coast of Spain, so we have set eyes for the first time on another country than our own. There are many other steamers in this stretch of water, some small and some as large as ours, some coming and some going. It is all much more lively than it was. Soon we have pointed out to us the place where the battle of Trafalgar was fought, when Britain won a victory that assured her the dominion of the seas up to the present time – a battle in which our greatest sailor, Lord Nelson, was killed in the moment of victory!

It is the next morning after this that, when we wake up, we find that the tossing and rocking motion has ceased; it is curiously quiet, the iron plates that bind the ship together no longer creak and groan as if they were in agony. We are bewildered. Then in a moment the meaning of all this flashes upon us. We have reached Gibraltar!

Coming up on deck we find the scene glorious. The sun is shining out of a cloudless sky on to a sea so blue that it gives one a sort of pleasant pain to look at its loveliness. The air is brilliant, as if we were living at the heart of a crystal. The ship is stealing along so silently and gently she hardly seems to move, and then she comes to anchor in a bay that seems to be surrounded on all sides with hills. Some of these hills, lying rather far away, gleam white in the sunshine; they are part of the great continent of Africa, and so, though it is only in the distance, we have set eyes on our first new continent. Towering up before us, with mighty bulk, is an immense rock, rising bald and rather awful into the pure sky. Near the summit its sides are completely bare, seamed by great gashes, and broken by masses of rock that look as if they might crash down at any moment. Apes live up there, wild mischievous creatures, who descend to steal from the orchards below, but are so shy that they are hardly ever seen of men. They are of a kind called Barbary apes, only found elsewhere in Africa; and it is thought that perhaps, many ages ago, Europe was joined to Africa at this point, and that when a great convulsion occurred which broke the two asunder and let the water flow through the Straits of Gibraltar some of the apes may have been left on this side, where their descendants still are, sundered for ever from their kinsfolk by the strip of sea.

About the base of the rock is a little town running up the hill and brightened by many trees – this is Gibraltar itself, one of the most famous places in the world. For this alone it is well worth while to come round by sea.

Anyone can see at a glance why it is so important. That little strait, about a dozen miles across, is the only natural entrance by water into the Mediterranean Sea, which lies all along the south of Europe. At the other end men have had to cut a way out by means of a canal. If ever European nations were at war, the nation which held Gibraltar would be able to prevent the ships of other countries from getting into or coming out of the Mediterranean. It could smash them with big guns if they tried,

or blow them up. So that even if the country on each side were flat this would still be an important place; but nature has made here a precipitous rock, which is a natural fortress, and by great good luck this belongs, not to the country of Spain, of which it is the southern part, but to Great Britain. To find out how this is so you must go to history. Gibraltar has been held by Britain for many years now, and though the King of Spain is very friendly with Britain, and has married an English princess, I think he must sometimes feel a little sore over Gibraltar.

Lying in a basin on one side of us are some of our own powerful and ugly ironclads, like bulldogs guarding the fort, and on the other side are ships of all nations, come on peaceful trading errands or for pleasure cruises, including a dainty little white French yacht that looks like a butterfly which has just alighted.

We go ashore in a launch and are met on the quay by a medley of strange folk and a great clamour of voices! The men and women are nearly all dark skinned and black eyed, and yet they are all speaking English after a fashion. A woman offers us a curiously twisted openwork basket of oranges, with the deep-coloured fruit gleaming through the meshes, a man implores us to take some of the absurdly neat little nosegays he has made up, picture postcards are thrust under our noses, and cabmen wildly beseech us to patronise their open vehicles. It is a brilliant scene, full of life and colour and warmth, and the people all seem good-humoured and jolly.

Sitting huddled up against a wall, with some odd-looking bundles beside them, are a group of very poor people; they are emigrants about to leave their own country for South America. Out there in the bay is the emigrant ship, and dipping toward her over the open water are several boats loaded down to the gunwale going out; others have reached her side and the people swarm up like flies. This group on the quay are awaiting their turn. A small boy and girl are rolling about in the sun like little lizards and laughing gaily. The little girl is called Maria and is about ten years old; she has a tiny scarlet shawl pinned across her chest, and her bright black hair shines in the sunlight; in her wee brown ears are little gilt ear-rings, and she is hugging tightly to her bosom a large and very gaudy doll. It is not exactly the kind of doll an English child would care about, because its face is the face of an idiot and it is made of some sort of poor composition stuff; its clothes are tawdry material of tinsel and stiff muslin, and are pinned on by pins with coloured glass heads glittering in the sun. Maria thinks it lovely and shrieks if her young brother Sebastian lays a finger on it. She is on the point of leaving her own country, perhaps for ever, to travel for thousands of miles to a land where everything is different from what she is used to; but she is as unconscious of this as if she were a little kitten, and as long as she can roll in the sunshine and hug her doll, the first she has ever possessed, the thought of the morrow does not trouble her soul.

Her home lies far away in the interior of Spain, and her parents have travelled to Gibraltar in carts and then in a marvellous thing called a train which made the children shriek with delight when it moved off without horses. Maria and Sebastian were brought up in a hovel with a mud floor, and only one room, shared with the donkey and the goat. They were never taught to obey, or to have their meals at regular hours, or to go to bed at night at a particular time; they ran in when they pleased, clamoured for something to eat or drink, or else fell down on a bundle of rags in the corner and were sound asleep in a moment. They often slept in the heat of the day and were up almost all night listening to a neighbour playing the guitar, or singing and rollicking with other children. Their usual drink was sour red wine made from grapes grown on the neighbouring hillsides after all the best juice had been already pressed out of them. This the peasants bought in immense bottles, swollen out below like little tubs, and cased in wicker-work with handles which made them easy to carry. In every hovel there was a bottle like this. To match it there was an enormous loaf of dark-coloured bread, made flat and round as a cart-wheel or a small table; bits of this were chopped off as required, and when Sebastian and Maria cried out they were hungry they had a lump of bread and sip of wine given to them, and then they became quite happy again. Sometimes they had olives with their bread, or chestnuts, or a salad made from herbs growing by the roadsides, and they had oranges very often

and goat's milk cheese. On high days and festival days they had sometimes very thin hot cabbage soup out of a great black pot that boiled over a few sticks; they dipped their bread into it or supped it up out of large flat wooden spoons, wrinkling their little noses meantime because it was so hot. A grand treat was a purple or crimson pomegranate given by a kindly neighbour.

When Maria was about seven the whole family moved into a town where the narrow streets were always dark between the tall thin houses. It was much more exciting here than in the country; there was always something to see, and in the evenings the whole place was like a bazaar with people coming and going, and shows and entertainments open half the night. On festival days the streets were gay with lanterns, and festoons of coloured paper and flags were waved until the children thought it like heaven.

Then came a talk of crossing the sea. Some members of the family and very many friends had already made a journey to a far-away country called Argentina, and others were thinking of going. It seemed that in that land, which was as sunny and warm as their own, there was more money to be made than in Spain, and as party by party made up their minds and set off in one of the great emigrant ships Maria's father grew more gloomy and unsettled, until at last, by one means or another, he had scraped together enough money to pay for their passages, and then they all started on the great adventure, even a greater one than our going round the world.

It is only a couple of days after leaving Gibraltar that we reach Toulon in good time in the morning. We anchor well outside the splendid bay, as Toulon is one of the most important French ports, and no prying eyes are wanted there. In the little steam-launch we run past the huge battleships *La Verité*, *La République*, and others lying solidly in a row manned by French sailors with little red top-knots on their flat caps. Then we see the beautiful range of high hills surrounding the bay, and are landed on the quay. The market is one of the most interesting things here, and we are lucky to be in time for it. Up a long narrow street are lines of open-air stalls covered with masses of fruit and vegetables. The natty little Frenchwomen who sell them almost all wear blue aprons and black dresses, and have little three-cornered shawls over their shoulders.

Look at that bunch of celery there, it is monstrous – the size of a child! Everything seems on a huge scale; there are artichokes on great stalks, melons gleaming deep orange-red and too large for any but a man to lift; scattered all about are bunches of little scarlet tomatoes not much bigger than grapes. But the oddest thing to us are the bunches of fungi, tawny-coloured, piled up in heaps, and evidently very popular! There are squares of matting covered with chestnuts, and whelks, like great snails, sticking out their horns and crawling over each other in a lively way. A strange medley! The flowers are lovely; you can buy a big bunch of violets for a sou, and sou is the peasant word for a halfpenny. Gladiolus, anemones, roses, and mignonette fill the air with fragrance. It is a beautiful place this market.

After lunch we stroll down to the quay again and wander idly about looking at the people until the launch comes to take us back to the steamer. There is a huge fat man seated on a low stool cleaning the boots of another man equally stout. Wedged into the corner beside them, so that they cannot stir, are two small white boys with thin pathetic little faces. As we watch we see the boot-cleaning man, who has a cruel, mean expression, pull hold of the little tunic of the nearer one, and point to a smear upon it, then deliberately he raises his large hand and smacks the child hard across the cheek. The little chap makes no effort to escape, – he evidently knows it is hopeless, – he only crooks a thin little arm over his cheek as he shrinks back. Deliberately the great man holds down the thin little arm and strikes him again with savage force. It is sickening! If we interfere the child will probably only get it worse afterwards. There are a few brutes like this who make their own children's lives a misery, though mostly French people are very kind. The children look so ill and pale, too, they probably don't get half enough to eat.

"May I get them some sweets?"

Happy thought! We passed a shop a minute ago. Here, wait a second, say to the father in your best French this sentence —

"Ils sont à vous, ces garçons, Monsieur? Très beaux garçons!"

You see you have put him in a good humour, he is pleased, though the poor little chaps are very far from being "beaux." They seem almost too stupefied to understand the sweets, but they know the way to put them in their mouths.

While we are waiting on the tender before it starts we see a different set of little boys; one, a delicate, pretty-looking little fellow, about your age, but not nearly so tall or strong, raises his cap and begins in English, "Good-day, Monsieur." His little companions sit around in awe at his knowledge and audacity. His name is Pierre, he tells us, and that badly dressed sturdy little boy with a sullen face is Louis. Pierre tries to make conversation in our own language to entertain us. "Are you to Australie going?" he asks. We tell him we are going first to Egypt. "Monter au chameau!" he cries excitedly, going off into a gabble of French and beseeching us to take him with us as "boy." We tell him that he is too small and that it costs much money. "Have you money – English?" he asks. He is very much interested when we show him half a crown and explain that it is equal to three francs of his own money. Then he catches sight of some English stamps. "Timbres!" he cries, and then, with a great effort, "I college," meaning "I collect." We give him a halfpenny stamp, which he carefully puts away in a battered purse already containing two French pennies. Louis, who has been giving convulsive hitches to his little trousers, which threaten to part company altogether with the upper garment, bursts in eagerly, asking us to give him a penny, adding solemnly: "Ma mère est morte," as if the fact of his mother being dead entitled him to demand it. We explain that it is not polite to ask for money. "Cigarette," he then says promptly. We tell him that in England the law forbids boys under sixteen to smoke, whereat they all shriek with laughter. So we add that Englishmen want to grow up tall strong men, and if they smoke as boys they won't, whereupon they grow grave again and nod their little heads wisely.

The waves are quite wild out in the bay and we have considerable difficulty in jumping on to the slippery step at the foot of the long gangway up the ship's side. Hanging on with a firm grip we struggle upward, and when we reach the top we see the little French boys waving their good-byes to us from the tender, Pierre bowing gracefully, cap in hand, Louis with his disreputable air of being a little ragamuffin and rejoicing in it.

CHAPTER III

FIERY MOUNTAINS

Do you learn Physical Geography? I did when I was in the schoolroom, but it is quite likely to have been given up now, or perhaps it is called by some other name. It sounds dull, but is not really, at least there was one part of it that interested me immensely, so much so that that particular page was thumbed and dirty with being turned over so many times. This was the page on which volcanoes were described. I never thought I should see a volcano, but the idea of these tempestuous mountains, seething with red-hot fire inside, and ready to vomit forth flames and lava at any time appealed to the imagination. This lava, it seemed, was a kind of thick treacly stuff, resembling pitch, which ran down the mountain-sides boiling hot and carried red ruin in its track. It seems nothing less than idiotic for people to live on the slopes of a volcano where such an awful fate might overtake them at any time, yet they not only *did* so but still *do*.

One of the reasons why we came by the Orient line is to see Naples, which stands almost under the shadow of one of the best-known volcanoes in the world – Vesuvius.

We arrive at Naples early in the morning and are the very first to be up and out on deck. The bay has been called one of the most lovely to be seen anywhere, but to-day at least it is disappointing, for there is no sun and only a dull grey drizzle, which carries our thoughts back to England at once.

The houses of the town rise in tiers up the hillside, very tall and straight, and seem to be filled with innumerable windows.

However, it is not the view of Naples itself which is called so beautiful but rather that of the bay *from* Naples, especially on a blue and golden day, and that we have no chance of seeing. On one side of the bay rises the mighty mountain whose furious deeds have made him known and respected all over the world. There is a heavy cloud hanging around his crest so that we cannot see the crater; the cloud looks as if it were composed of smoke as much as anything else, for even yet Vesuvius is terribly alive.

We get a hasty breakfast, for though we are going to be here till late afternoon, there is much to see, and we have no time to spare. Then we get into a little launch and steam past all the great ships lying at anchor. On the quay we find ourselves in a great crowd of grey uniformed soldiers, many of them mere lads, carrying their kit, and drawn up in lines waiting their turn to march on board the towering troopship anchored alongside, while some of them wind up the gangway like a great grey snake. Those already in the ship are letting down ropes to draw up bottles of wine or baskets of fruit from the women who sell such things. Within a short time Italy has become mistress of Tripoli, a country in Africa, and now she is finding she will have to garrison it in order to hold it; and though it costs her a great deal of money she is sending out many of her young soldiers to guard the new possession.

We get some money changed on the quay, receiving in exchange a number of lire; the lira is very like a franc and corresponds with it and the English shilling, though a little less in value.

This done we walk along the front to the station. Many of the streets are high and broad with splendid houses lining them. In them are men busily at work washing away the mud with long hose pipes mounted on little wheels, so that they look like giant lizards or funny snakes on legs running across the streets by themselves, and as much alive as the well-known advertisement of the carpet-sweeper and Mary Ann!

Other streets are very narrow and filled with people buying and selling. There are swarms of children rolling about in the filth of the roadway; they are dressed in rags and their bodies show through the large holes. They are often playing with old bones or pebbles. Their faces are sometimes quite beautiful, rich golden-brown in colour, and their great velvety brown eyes look so sweetly

innocent you would be easily taken in by them; but they are terrible little rogues and would beg from you or steal if they got the chance. Here and there are shops where macaroni is sold; it is ready boiling in great pans; this and cakes made of a kind of flour called polenta are the chief food of the Italians. The macaroni is made out of flour mixed with water to a stiff paste and squeezed through holes in a box till it comes out in long strings. It used to be made in all the dust and dirt of the villages, and is still often to be seen hanging over posts there to dry, but there are now large manufactories where it is made quite cleanly by machinery; we shall see some as we pass on our way to Pompeii, where we are going. There is one pleasant thing to notice, namely, wherever you look you see flowers growing; the larger and better-class houses have balconies filled with broad-leaved plants and creepers, and the very poorest people living high up towards the sky have window-boxes filled with flowers.

At the station we find a little train, like a tram, with red velvet cushions, and while we sit and wait for it to take us to Pompeii, the city buried by Vesuvius, the rain falls softly and steadily. Presently the stationmaster and his assistant step out gingerly along the uncovered platform, holding umbrellas over their uniforms, and give the word of command, and very slowly we start, and jolt along, stopping frequently. We pass through market gardens first and then through endless vineyards, in many of which the clinging vines are not propped up on sticks, but merely looped from one poplar tree to another, for the trees are growing in straight rows and form a natural support. This ground is particularly good for vines, for the lava which has been dug into the soil is peculiarly fruitful.

There are little white box-like houses amid the vines, and they are hung all over with bunches of brilliant scarlet fruit, which, when we get near enough to see, we find to be tiny tomatoes. Other houses have pumpkins also and melons and chillies, all hanging out to get dried, so that they look quite decorative with their strange adornments. Suddenly our attention is called to a broad strip of black earth, in shape like a river, flowing down the hillside, but made up of huge blocks as if it had been turned up by a giant ploughshare. This is a lava bed made by the last great explosion of Vesuvius in 1906, when the lava ran down in molten streams, tearing its way through the vineyards and sweeping across the railway lines; at that time two hundred people were killed. An enterprising firm has run a little railway to the very top of Vesuvius, and anyone who cares to do so can go by it and peep into the awful crater at the summit, and a cinematograph operator has recently been down one thousand feet into the crater to take films for exhibition. When Vesuvius is in a bad humour and has growled and grumbled for some days, people are not allowed to go up to the top lest he vomit forth his fury even while they are there and overwhelm them.

While we are on the way to Pompeii I will tell you something of the fascinating story.

Many years ago, long before the people on our islands were civilised, when Britons ran about dressed in skins and floated in wicker-boats covered by skins, there were intelligent and refined people living all round the base of Vesuvius; they knew, of course, that the mountain was a volcano, but there had never been any very terrible explosion that they could remember, and, anyway, the slopes of the mountain where the towns stood extended so far from the crater that no one thought it possible for any great disaster to happen. The two principal towns were called Herculaneum and Pompeii. The people there dressed in lovely silks and satins; they had beautifully built houses filled with statues and pictures: the women wore costly jewellery; they had plenty of amusements, for they danced and sang and visited each other, and had stalls at the amphitheatre, and supported candidates at political elections, and gossiped and drove in chariots, and lived and loved. They thought, as we all do in our turn, that they knew everything and that no one could reach so high a pinnacle of civilisation as they had reached. This was only about fifty years after Christ's death on the cross, and the Christians were still a comparatively small and despised band.

Well, one day there was a certain amount of uneasiness felt, for a curious black cloud had formed over Vesuvius, and it was not quite like anything that had ever been seen before; people also spoke of strange rumblings in the bowels of the earth, and there was an oppressiveness in the air which alarmed the timid. Then came terrifying noises, cracklings and explosions, and a fine dust

filled the air and began settling down everywhere; no sooner was it brushed off than there it was again; it penetrated even close shut houses, and filled the hinges so that the doors would not open easily. The rich people began to make arrangements to get away, but before they could carry them out awful confusion fell upon them; day was turned to night, the clouds of dust fell thickly and chokingly, stifling men as they ran; volumes of lava poured forth, sweeping like fiery serpents down the mountain-side; they rushed over Herculaneum, which was not far from Pompeii, so that while the one city was boiled the other was smothered. Curses and prayers alike were no avail. Men were caught and choked, houses were silted up, and the whole district was buried.

Years passed and the tradition of the destroyed cities remained; it was known that they were thereabouts, but so completely had the mountain done its work that no one knew exactly where, and it was only comparatively recently that money was subscribed and the work of unearthing them began. By the railway we have passed through Herculaneum, and here we are at Pompeii. Now you shall see what this city of two thousand years ago was like.

The station is close to it, and as we step out of the train we go almost immediately into the gates of the once buried but now uncovered city, which is one of the wonders of the world, attracting people across leagues of sea and land.

We find ourselves in a long narrow street lined by roofless houses. The stones which form the pavement are uneven and much worn, the foot-walks on each side are raised very high, because in wet weather these streets were mere torrents and the water rushed down them. Here and there are stepping-stones, to enable people to cross from one side to the other. It would have been impossible in most places for two chariots or carts to pass one another, and we wonder how they managed. As a fact, the Pompeians did not use wheeled vehicles much, but chairs or palanquins, and the men went on horseback. There are many open counters beside the street, showing that these buildings were used as shops, and in one or two are large marble basins hollowed out where the wine which was sold was kept cool. Along the side of one house is a gaudily painted serpent, signifying that an apothecary, or, as we should say, a chemist, lived here.

We can go into one of the better-class dwelling-houses and we find that it was built around a courtyard or central hall, and we can peep into the sleeping-rooms, which, in spite of all the luxury of the inhabitants, were mere little dark cupboards with no light or air. Well, so they were in our castles until quite recently! There was a garden behind the hall in all the better-class houses, and this had almost always a tank for gold-fish; we can see it still; but all the little personal things that have been unearthed – the jewellery and household utensils and even the statues – have been taken to the museum at Naples for safe keeping, which is a pity, as the streets and living-rooms seem bare and cold and we need a good deal of imagination to picture them as they must have been.

Here at last is something that makes us start and brings back the awful scene of death and dismay. In a deep recess by a doorway are six skeletons, lying in various attitudes, left exactly as they were found. These people had been caught; they were hurrying, evidently to get out of the outer door, and finding it had been silted up by dust and that they could not open it, had turned back, too late, and been smothered! There they lie now, nearly two thousand years after, just as then.

There were about two thousand skeletons thus found and taken away – only these few were left to give visitors some idea of the tragedy that happened. The sticky dust and ashes which poured down upon the doomed city reached a depth of twenty-six feet, and they encased everything in a kind of crust. Dogs and cats were caught in this way, and even little lizards, such as those that live in the cracks of the walls in Italy to this day; and though their bodies had decayed away long before they could be dug out, yet the exact impression remained, and in many cases, by pouring soft plaster into the holes, men have reproduced to the life the poor little wriggling body that was caught in such a terrible prison! You can imagine what great value it has been to historians to find the things used by people so long ago. In most cases customs change gradually; the implements and utensils which one generation

use are broken and lost and replaced by new fashions, but here, in one lump, stamped down hard for ever, are the things caught in a second of time and held in an iron grip while the years rolled by.

Passing on we find a small temple to the Egyptian god Isis, and this was the very first object to be discovered. Some men quarrying for stone struck upon it and thus the long-lost site of the town was found. Then we see the public baths with all the arrangements for heating the water; the Pompeians, like the Romans, were very fond of bathing. But it is the little things of everyday life that impress us most, and we are brought up suddenly by seeing on a wall a poster of the day advocating the return of one particular candidate to what was the Pompeian Parliament. This carries us right back into the midst of them! So does also that drinking-fountain by the street side, where the marble has been worn hollow by the hands of those who leaned on it as they stretched forward to drink at the spout!

We can walk through the market-place where the people bought and sold, and look down into the great amphitheatre where the shows which they all loved were held; but as our ship leaves at four o'clock we shall have to tear ourselves away and hurry back along the little line again, running round the base of the sullen brooding mountain which may at any time hurl down his thunder-bolts on the vineyards which still creep up his sides. Past Herculaneum, now partly unburied, and so to gay Naples, where the sun is breaking out.

On the quay we see barrows covered with a curious flesh-coloured fruit about the size and shape of a large pear, and this is quite new to us. We discover these are called Indian figs; but why Indian? They are grown here and are a popular native fruit. They are covered by a thick skin, easily peeled off, and are full of juice and very large pips; they have a sweetish rather sickly taste, but one can imagine they must be a great boon to the poor Italians who can get a good refreshing drink for almost nothing.

Once aboard we discover that something has gone wrong – a propeller has dropped a blade and the ship will not start for some hours. We might have stayed longer in Pompeii after all!

There are compensations for everything and soon we find that this delay is going to be a good one for us, for it will enable us to see two other volcanoes which otherwise we should have missed in the darkness.

We ask the night-steward to wake us in time for the first, and it seems as if our heads had hardly touched the pillows when we hear his voice at the door, "Stromboli in sight, sir!" It is cold and we are very sleepy; grumbling, we make our way to the front of the deck below the bridge, and suddenly, in the blackness ahead, there shoots up a short straight column of fire like that from the chimney of a blast furnace. It disappears as quickly and quietly as it came, and odd bits of flame, like red-hot cinders, roll this way and that, then all is black again. As the sky quickly lightens we see outlined against it a cone or pyramid, and from the summit there shoots out another column of flame, to disappear almost instantly.

"Stromboli sky-rocketing," says the voice of one of the officers on the bridge above.

All the time we are gliding nearer and nearer to the wonderful mountain, when, with an amazing swiftness, up flashes the sun, sweeping rays of colour over the sky, changing it from pale primrose to fiery orange, and there, black against it, is a little island so neatly made that it appears an exact triangle with a bite out of one side near the top. Stromboli is one of a group of little islands. What had appeared as flame in the darkness shows at the next eruption to be a puff of smoke from which burning lumps fall on the rocky sides and down the precipices. This happens about every quarter of an hour. The sea meantime changes to vivid blue. We are quite close now and can see tiny white houses nestling on the edge of the island amid clusters of green. What happens to the people if the boiling lava rolls down through their vineyards and into their houses? There is no one to answer that question. Perhaps it never gets so far, perhaps Stromboli has not yet shown himself to be a fierce volcano, but limits his eruptions to angry splutterings which beat on the scarred precipices of the steep sides above the dwellings of the people, – anyway, I don't think I should care to live there, just in case —

We awake suddenly from our intent gazing to find ourselves the laughing-stock of a crowd of decently dressed men and women who have come up in the daylight, properly clad, and there are we

in dressing-gowns, not over-long, and slippers on feet! But no one minds these little mishaps on board ship, and with dignity we pass through to our cabin, smiling and feeling very superior to have seen so much more than the lie-abeds!

As it happens, it is Sunday morning and a very different day from yesterday, with bright sun and a clear sky. As a rule there is service on board ship on Sundays, but to-day we are just going to pass through the Straits of Messina, and the captain must be on the bridge the whole time, and there is no clergyman to take the duty for him, so we can't have it. But we could hardly pass a Sunday better than in admiring the marvellous beauty which God has given to us in this world for our delight.

It is about four hours after passing Stromboli that we enter the straits which separate Sicily, the three-cornered island, from Italy, which seems to be kicking it away with the toe of its foot. Land begins to close in on us, and in the dazzling sunshine it appears radiant, while the sea is a mirror of blue. On both sides we see houses and villages built on the sloping shores, but the interest heightens when we come close abreast the great town of Messina which, on the 20th of December 1908, suddenly became world-famous owing to the awful misfortune which befell it. All educated people knew Messina by name previously, but it was not until the Italian wires flashed the story of the earthquake which had wrought destruction so swiftly and dramatically that it will always be ranked as among the most appalling that ever happened, that everyone with one consent turned their attention to Messina, and the eyes of the whole world were focused on it. The suddenness of the calamity was the most terrible feature of it. It was early in the morning when the earth shook and heaved and raised itself, and in about four minutes, what had been a happy prosperous town was reduced to a smoking ruin, a shambles of dead bodies, and a hell on earth for the miserable beings who lived in it! Almost all the houses fell together; whole streets of them collapsed like a pack of cards, and the shock was so tremendous that in many cases even the bricks and stone of which they were made were ground to powder. Tens of thousands of people were buried before they could get into the streets, and their own houses, where they had been happy and miserable, had been born or married or suffered, were turned into their tombs. Those who were killed outright were not the most unfortunate, for others were caught by a limb beneath falling stones, or crushed and held yet living, and their direful shrieks of agony added to the horrors, for there was none to help them, all were in the grip of the same misfortune. To add to the disaster flames broke out from the ruined houses, and the city was lit by the lurid light of fire rising to heaven. No one will ever know how many hapless creatures were burnt to death! There was no possibility of working the telegraph wires, and the people left alive simply had to wait for help till help came. And meantime volumes of water, disturbed by the change of sea-level, rolled in upon the land!

Directly the news startled the whole civilised world, ships of all nations, which happened to be anywhere near, hastened to the rescue. Camps were hastily run up and the survivors taken to them, food was supplied to all who needed it, the wounded and maimed were attended to, and wherever possible those who were still living in the ruins were dug out and set free. But, as you may imagine, this was a work of great danger, because dragging out a beam or stone often sent a shattering avalanche down on the top of the rescuers.

The number of those destroyed can never be known certainly, but it is estimated at somewhere about 200,000, for Messina is a large town. Charitable people sent subscriptions from all quarters; money flowed in; those children who had lost their parents, and even in some cases their names and identity, being too small to give any account of themselves, were placed in kind homes and provided for, and those who were completely crippled assured of support; others were given the means to start life once more. It is difficult to imagine that all this happened only a few short years ago now; even though we are quite close to Messina, and have the use of a very fine pair of field-glasses, it is difficult to make out any of the mischief. It appears as if the houses had been rebuilt, warehouses and chimneys stand as usual, and the great viaduct spans the valley; but those who know say that this is only a good face seen from the sea, and that ruins still lie in quantities behind. In the memories of those who

passed through the earthquake there must be a shuddering horror never to be forgotten, a black mark passing athwart their lives and cutting them into two parts – that before and that after the catastrophe.

Farther on more little villages appear, some looking just like a spilt box of child's bricks tumbled any way down a mountain spur. Then we catch sight of the great majesty of Etna, the third volcano we have seen in two days, and we stand lost in admiration of his pure beauty.

The smoothness of the eternal snow glows like a silver shield on the breast of the giant peak. Far below are vineyards, olive groves, orchards, and orange and lemon groves, for Sicily is celebrated for these fruits. Above them are beech-woods, so deep and dark that they are seldom penetrated even by the peasants; beautiful as the beech is, it is a poisonous tree and nothing can live beneath its shade.

It is all so smiling and peaceful on this serene Sunday morning that we can hardly believe that in Etna too there lies the raging demon of mighty force. Even as we watch a faint puff of pure white smoke, so thin that it might be mistaken for a wisp of cloud, floats away from the peak into the infinite blue, and we know by his breath that the demon is not dead but only sleeping.

"Lucky indeed to get Etna clear of clouds," says one of the passengers near us. "I've been through the Straits a score of times and I've hardly ever seen it as you are seeing it for the first time to-day."

Volcanoes and earthquakes are closely connected. There lies within this world of ours an imprisoned power of vital heat, which now and again bursts through at weak places in the crust. Geologists tell us that these weak places may be traced in long lines on the earth's surface, and along one of them lie the volcanoes we have seen. But the laws which govern the earthquake and the volcano are hardly yet understood, even to-day.

After calling at another little Italian port for the mails, we do not stop anywhere for the next few days, but steam along steadily, making up for lost time. We have seen something of the southern part of our own continent of Europe. We have landed in Spain at Gibraltar, we set foot on French soil in Toulon, where the steamer called to take on passengers from across France, we have visited Italy at Naples, and these are the principal countries which line the huge land-locked sea. In old times the whole civilised world centred around the Mediterranean, and Rome, which is now the capital of Italy, dominated it all, making one mighty empire. The dominion of Rome reached far northward to our own islands, and she was so secure and supreme in her power that it never entered the heads of the Romans then living that some day the whole empire would be split up and distributed. Their dominion reached even to Egypt, where we are now going, and to the Holy Land, which we shall visit afterwards; their fleets covered the sea, their armies strode hot-footed across the land, making broad ways that passed over hill and valley without pause or rest, yet now the empire of Rome is but a name.

CHAPTER IV

THE STRANGEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

Looking down from the deck of the *Orontes* it seems as if we were peering into the folds of a black gauze curtain, between which demons from the pit rush yelling to and fro. These men are black from head to foot, with the exception of the gleaming white teeth which show between their open lips. They are black to begin with by nature, and are further covered, scanty clothing and all, with a thick coating of coal-dust, which sticks to their oily skins and dirty rags. They are digging frantically into the heaped-up coal of a great barge lying alongside, gathering it into baskets and rushing up planks to deposit it in the coal bunkers of the steamer, and all the while they shout in a strange chant at the tops of their voices. When white men are doing severe work they are silent, as they need all their strength for the task in hand, but when their dark-skinned brothers work they find it necessary to shout as loudly as they can, and the harder the work the more noise they make. At a little distance their confused yelling is like the cheering of a great crowd at a popular football match.

All the port-holes have been closed to keep out the dust, the ship's carpets are rolled away, the place looks as if prepared for a spring cleaning. It is time for us to go, for we have arrived at Port Said, the principal landing-place for Egypt, and we have to say good-bye to the *Orontes* here, though we shall not forget her as the first of the many ships which carry us on our great adventure.

It is easy enough to get a boat, competition is keen, and the laughing bright-eyed boys who row us across seem in the best of humour; they make a brilliant picture, for they are dressed in scarlet and blue for choice, with bits of orange wherever they can stick them on.

Port Said, where we have landed, is a large town with a big business, yet it is built on a site which a comparatively short time ago was nothing but a marshy salt lake. Men of all nations walk in its streets, and ships of all nations pass through its port. It is a strange mingling of East and West. Here the two meet, and those who come from the West for the first time cry with delight, "This is the East!" while those who have been exiled for many years from their western homes and are at last returning, exclaim, drawing a long breath, "Now I feel I really am in sight of home."

We are actually in Africa, that mysterious land which still contains the greater part of the unexplored territory of the world, and which for long was described as "The Unknown Continent," though it can hardly be called that now. Of all the countries which make up Africa, Egypt is the strangest, indeed, she is the strangest country in all the world – a weird and mysterious land whose ways are not as the ways of any other country on earth.

Imagine a land much longer than it is broad, in the shape of an ordinary hearth-rug, and then lay down lengthwise along this a mighty river which divides it into two parts. Have you seen the Eiffel Tower? If not, you have at all events seen pictures of it, well, imagine an Eiffel Tower lying prostrate along the hearth-rug and you will have a pretty fair idea of Egypt and its river. The legs of the Eiffel Tower are very near the bottom and stick out sharply; from the point where they meet the long body stretches upwards straight as an arrow.

The Nile is like that. Not so far above where it runs into the Mediterranean Sea it is split up into many channels like the legs of the tower. It is at the foot of one of these legs we have just landed, and presently we are going to pass on up to the junction of the many channels at Cairo, which is the capital town of Egypt. Of course the Nile is not perfectly straight and rigid like the man-made tower; it winds and turns, as all rivers do, but, taking it as a whole, the comparison is a good one.

We have to wait for our baggage to be brought across from the ship so that we can see it through the custom-house, and here it comes at last; it is carried by a boy about your age who is simply lost to sight beneath it. They begin young! He stands grinning, well pleased with himself. He certainly

deserves a good tip, for he is no shirker. We have just got some Egyptian money from Cook's, so can give it him in his own coinage, though he would not in the least mind taking English money.

Egyptian money is not very difficult to understand: the principal coin is a piastre, which is equal to twopence-halfpenny; and half a piastre, which looks like a silver sixpence, but isn't silver at all, serves the purposes of a penny, though it is really equal to a penny-farthing. There are no coppers here. The most useful coin – corresponding to our shilling, the French franc, and the Italian lira – is rather like an overgrown shilling to look at and equal to five piastres or a halfpenny more than a shilling.

Now we have only to buy some cigarettes for me and some Turkish Delight for – well, for us both! Then we can go on to our train. Cigarettes and Turkish Delight are the two things no one ever fails to buy at Port Said, for here you get them good and cheap.

It will take us four hours to reach Cairo by rail, and we shan't see anything of the country, as it is dark. And what a country it is!

You will never get used to it, for it is run on lines of its own. The part of it lying between the legs of the imaginary Eiffel Tower, in other words, between the mouths of the Nile, is called the Delta, from the Greek letter Δ , which shape it is. Except in this delta rain never falls, that is to say, not to speak of. Up in Assouan, one of the larger towns, which we shall visit, they say, for instance, "Rain? Let me see – oh yes, we did have a shower, two years ago it was, on such and such a day at four in the afternoon. Pretty smart shower too; the roofs of the mud houses got squashy and slipped down on the inhabitants. Quite funny, wasn't it?"

It seems funny to us that anyone could remember the hour of one particular shower two years ago! With us if there is no rain for a few weeks the farmers begin to cry out that their crops are ruined. What a glorious land Egypt must be to live in when there is no chance of any excursion being spoiled by the weather!

"But how in the world does anything manage to grow?"

I thought you would ask that. Egypt has a system of its own. Once every year this gigantic river, which cleaves the land into two parts, rises and overflows all its banks; it submerges the low-lying flat land near it and carries all over it a rich fertilising mud. The land is thoroughly soaked, and when the Nile slowly retires, sinking back into its channel, the crops are planted in the spongy earth.

For many ages no one knew why this happened, and indeed no one troubled to ask; the ancient Egyptians thought the Nile was a god, and that this wonderful overflow was a miracle of beneficence performed for their benefit. Then Europeans began to penetrate into the heart of Africa and the mystery was solved. The Nile rises far up in the vast continent where there are mighty lakes lying in among the hills. The three largest of these lakes are called Victoria, Albert, and Edward, after our sovereigns, for the men who discovered them were British and naturally carried the names of their rulers to plant as banners wherever they penetrated. These lakes are not in Egypt, but far beyond, in a region where at one season of the year there is a terrific downfall of rain; this swells them up and makes them burst forth from every outlet in a tremendous flood. The Nile carries off most of this water, and some other rivers, which flow into it up there, bring down masses of water too, and all this rushes onward, spreading far over the thirsty land of Egypt and turns the desert into a garden, making it "blossom as the rose." Wherever the water reaches the land bears fruit, but beyond it is sandy and sterile desert.

The length of this amazing river from Lake Victoria to the sea is now reckoned to be between three thousand and four thousand miles, or almost half the length of the earth's diameter, and for over a thousand miles it receives no tributaries at all. In almost all rivers we are accustomed to we see streams and other tributaries running in and swelling the volume of water as the main river passes down to the sea, but for all these miles the Nile flows unsupported and unreplenished beneath the blazing sun. No wonder the Egyptians worshipped anything so splendid!

The total length of England and Scotland together, from John o' Groats to Land's End, is eight hundred miles, which gives us a measuring rod to estimate the length of this splendid highway, which is frequently half a mile broad.

Though the yearly inundation made cultivation possible, men soon learned that it was not enough; besides this they must water the crops between times, and so means were devised for storing up the water; but these were mostly very simple and primitive until Great Britain went to Egypt to help the Khedive out of his difficulties and to teach him how to govern for the good of his people. Then immense works were started for holding up the water which would otherwise have run away to the sea at flood-time and been wasted.

We arrive at Cairo very late at night, and when we get to our bedroom we find both beds looking rather like large meat-safes, for they are enclosed in white net curtains. These fall from a top or ceiling resembling that on old four-posters.

You stare at them in a puzzled way a minute or so, and then declare, "What a stuffy arrangement! I'm not going to sleep shut in like that!"

"Please yourself, but you run the risk of having red lumps on your nose in the morning if a mosquito takes a fancy to you!"

"Oh, they're mosquito-curtains! I've heard of them. What are you going to do?"

"Run no risks!"

At last, protesting, you agree to do likewise, and climb inside your meat-safe. You'll soon get used to it, and though it is too cold here for any mosquito to be very lively, it is safer. In some countries the curtains are useful for keeping off worse things than mosquitoes – tarantulas, for instance!

We are only staying one day in Cairo so are out early the next morning, and find that the town looks on the whole very like a French town. Indeed, were it not for the red fez or tarboush which so many men wear, even when they dress otherwise in European costume, and for the turbans and flowing robes of the native dress, we might be in Paris or Marseilles.

We go to the top of a very wide main street to await the tram which is to take us to the Pyramids.

"Poste-carte, sir-r-r-r," says insinuatingly a ragged ruffian, thrusting vividly coloured picture postcards into our faces as we stand. We turn away, shaking our heads. He quickly runs round to face us again, "Poste-carte, sir-r-r-r," in a tone as if the conversation had only just begun and he had great hopes of a sale.

"No, thank you; go away," I say as sternly and emphatically as I can, for he is not too clean.

"Poste-carte, Cismus cards, nice," he continues with unabated zeal as if we had not spoken at all. Resolutely we turn our backs on him and are confronted by a very gorgeous individual in a long loose gown and turban, with innumerable strings of beads of the cheapest and commonest "Made-in-Germany" kind, hung in festoons round his neck. "Beades, sir-r-r," he begins persuasively, and the other chimes in a duet, "Poste-carte." "Beades," continues the new tormentor, swinging his wares in our faces. Evidently "no" is a word not understood by these gentry. They go on at it hard for about five minutes, our stony silence in no way diminishing their enthusiasm, and then from the corner of my eye I see a tall man, with an exceptionally handsome face, clothed in a beautiful long coat of blue cloth cut away to show a great orange sash underneath.

"You want guide?" he says, hastening to the fray and sending the other men flying with "Imshi, imshi!" "Me good guide, beest guide in Cairo, show you Pyramids, all-a sights, verry cheap, sirr, me show you, only ten shillings, citadel and – "

"I don't want a guide, thank you."

The gentleman's knowledge of English is limited apparently, for he doesn't understand that. In exactly the same tone in which he has just spoken he begins again, "Me good guide, showing you all sights, cheap, verry cheap, Pyramids, telling you all things, bazaar, only eight shilling – "

By the time he has worked himself through all the grades down to two shillings, his eye falls on two other newly arrived tourists, evidently Americans, and he rushes upon the fresh prey. Luckily

our car comes in sight just then, for a second dragoman, as these guides are called, has just caught sight of us and is racing across the street as fast as his legs will carry him.

As the tram starts we hear his desperate "Me verry good guide, best – bazaar – " He is quite willing to risk his life in jumping on to the moving tram at the smallest sign from us, so we simply hold our breath and resolve not to wink an eyelid until the danger is past.

So those are the Pyramids!

We have arrived after a very cold and rather monotonous run of about an hour.

Was there ever a time when one had not heard of the Pyramids and pictured their vast triangles rising out of the desert? But for my part, I had always imagined them set far off in solitude so that one came upon them gradually, seeing them first as mere hillocks in the immensity of the sand. Instead of that they spring upon us suddenly, rearing up on a height as the tram speeds toward them along a tree-shaded road across a vast artificial lake.

The lake is picturesque, studded with little islands and promontories covered with houses and palm trees, so also are the groups of donkeys and camels with their attendant men waiting at the terminus for tourists, but these things disperse the mystery to which we had looked forward. The large and comfortable hotel at the foot of the white winding road which leads up to the Pyramids is doubtless useful, but —

As we approach on foot we experience surprise to see that the blocks of which the largest Pyramid is composed are so small they look almost like bricks. Pictures show them as gigantic blocks up which stout ladies are being "boosted" – sorry, but there is no other word – by heated dragomans. As we draw near we see that the blocks *are* fairly big. Nearer still – what is that crawling about on the edge of the great cone? Hullo, it's a man, and there is another and another. They do look small. Why, there is one who has reached the top; he is not to be compared with a fly so much as a midge – who would have thought it? We are close under now and I find that the block by which I am standing is the height of my shoulder, and I am fairly tall. This must be an exceptional one, but – it isn't! They are all the same! Watching the men clambering up above, – men who we now see are English soldiers dressed in khaki, – we can understand why they seem to find the ascent so difficult – each block is shoulder high and requires much strenuous exertion to surmount. They cannot stride from one to the other as on a flight of stairs. One man is exhausted and gives up half-way, and a cheerful Cockney voice comes down from above telling him to "put his beck into it!" He'll need it. Standing thus and looking up we get some idea of the enormous size of the Pyramid, which makes its blocks look small by contrast. It is bigger, far bigger than one expected. This is the largest of all, built anything between 5000 and 6000 years ago, as the tomb of King Cheops. He built it for himself by cruel forced labour crushed out of starving men; he intended that his body should lie like the kernel of a nut in this mighty shell.

As we pass beyond it we see another, farther off in the desert sand, and yet another. We are accustomed to speak of the Pyramids as if these few at Gizeh were all, but there are others scattered about Egypt, though they are less known and visited.

Then, quite unexpectedly, we come upon the Sphinx. It is in a hollow in the sand like the nest children scoop out for shelter on the seashore, only vastly greater. As we struggle round the yielding rim, with the powdery sand silting over our boot-tops, we feel something of the wonder of it thrilling through us. Let us sit down here facing it by these broken stones, where we can be a little sheltered from the chilly wind and gritty sand. We are looking at the oldest thing in Egypt. You will see farther south many splendid examples of amazing age but nothing to equal the Sphinx. When Abraham came down into Egypt the Sphinx was old beyond the memory of man! When King Cheops built his Pyramid the Sphinx sat with his back turned to it wearing the same inscrutable smile that it has to-day. It has watched kings succeed and die, it has watched empires spread and collapse, it has watched civilisations ripen and wither away. All the known history of mankind has unrolled before it, not the short history of a few trifling centuries which we call ours, but the history of the world.

The crouching figure is lion-like in attitude, but how human of face in spite of its broken nose. It was carved of the solid rock and fashioned with its face to the sunrise and its back to the desert. No one knows the thought in the mind of the puny artist who brought it into being and then shrivelled beside it like a blade of grass. Was it intended to be a god? It has been silted up by sand and unburied again; it has been worshipped and hated. It has been revered and shot at, so that its face is chipped and its nose broken away, and still it smiles with fierce serenity.

Sit silently.

"Poste-carte – "

"Imshi, imshi."

That Arabic word, picked up at hazard from the dragoman, has acted like a talisman – the pest has actually gone!

There creeps up beside you, very slowly and determinedly, an old, old man. "Fortune told," he says almost in a whisper, groping for your hard boyish hand. So be it! He at least does not send the spirit of the place flying away. Nonsense it may be, but these fellows do know something —

Give him that five piastre piece that looks like a large shilling and listen to his quaint expressive English.

"Clever head, head very much good, gooder than many men, but an enemy inside there. You see a long, long road, and you go that road, then coming hills and that road grow tiresome and you stop and say, 'Not worth it, I don't care,' an enemy here – slay him!

"Much work lies to your hands to do when they grow large. In many lands I see them plucking down cities and raising ships from the depths of the sea. Strange things be waiting for those hands in all the world. Many tongues you speaking, and many things you gain. But the hand not opening easily. What it gains it grips, hard and tight; it is a close hand, and that which comes thereout drops slowly between the fingers to friends also as to foes. Riches and work and honour hold the hands, and only death will tear them away. With them all is a bitterness and a glory greater than the shine of what men count joy. But in that day when you eat with kings the desire of life shall pass from you!"

Hullo, old boy! He gave you a good shilling's worth, anyhow! Though it was rather a nasty hit that at your Scottish national character! You don't believe it surely? Look at the Sphinx and laugh. What does it matter if we two midges, among all the midges that have crawled about his paws, don't exactly enjoy ourselves the whole of our brief day?

What is that? How you start! No, it's not a lion roaring, though it's a pretty good imitation; it's only a camel cursing and snarling with all his might while his owner piles a few bushels' weight on his back. He doesn't really mind it, but it is the immemorial custom of camels to protest with hideousness and confused noise, and if he didn't do it his trade union would be down upon him.

"Poste-carte – "

Come, let us go!

CHAPTER V

THE HIGHWAY OF EGYPT

Of course you have been in a cinematograph theatre, and there, seated comfortably, have watched the various scenes pass before you. The great charm of these scenes is that the people really did do the things which we here see them doing, even down to the smallest gestures. But often the pleasure is spoiled by knowing that the actors were only making these gestures for the purpose of being photographed; also the scenes are sometimes disconnected and scrappy, and seldom indeed is it that they are represented in colour, and then, though the colour is clever enough, it is not like that of nature.

To-day we are watching a cinematograph which has none of these drawbacks. We are seated in a leather-lined railway carriage running from Cairo southward up the country to a place called Luxor, and passing before us every minute are vivid pictures of the life of Egypt. The railway runs along the middle of Egypt, just as the Nile does, but we do not often see the river from the line, for at this time of the year it flows low down between its banks. It is on the other side of the railway that the main interest lies. Here there is a canal as straight as the line and close beside it, and on the far side of it is a sort of raised tow-path – the great highway of Egypt. We see it against a fringe of bushy palm trees at one minute, and the next against a field of tall, green-growing stuff, which looks exactly like those rushes found on the banks of our own rivers. This, however, is maize, or, as you probably know it better, Indian corn, which forms the staple food of the people. The brown feathery heads wave in the wind, but the corn itself is tucked away in the thickness of the stalk. You must have seen a "cob" of Indian corn some time, with all the flat yellow grains nestling in a honeycomb of little cells. To-day in Egypt you will see everyone eating them; even the solemn baby seated astride its mother's shoulder picks out the grains and nibbles them like a little monkey. The straw part of the plant is used for many things: it feeds the numerous domestic animals of the Egyptians to begin with – the donkeys, camels, buffaloes, bullocks, goats – and it forms thatch for the huts and makes bedding.

Notice that man over there in the field; his cotton gown is of the purest blue, which shows up richly against the vivid green of the maize stalks. There is another seated far back on the rump of a small donkey who is tripping along on its stiff little legs. It wears no harness of any kind beyond a cord round its neck, which enables anyone to catch hold of it. The man has no saddle and he holds his long legs straight forward to prevent his feet from touching the ground, and from time to time he guides or goads the donkey with a little sharp-pointed stick. Close behind him, walking fast to keep up, is a tall woman in black with a black shawl covering her mouth, her dress is a mass of grey dust as far as the waist, and drags up the dust in clouds as she moves. On her head is a large bundle and on her hip a large baby. She is the wife of the lordly individual riding so comfortably ahead, and she takes this state of affairs as a matter of course. The scene arouses anger in the breast of a nice American with a grey moustache and keen grey eyes, who shares our compartment.

"So long as they treat their womenfolk like that they'll never rise to anything better," he says emphatically. "The higher the civilisation of a nation is the higher the position of its women. A nation of men who ride and let the women carry the burdens is bound to be rotten and flabby."

Next there passes across our window-frame a flock of goats, but they are not much like those we know – they are dark brown and black, with thick rough coats and cheeky tufted tails; numbers of kids dance up and down the steep sides of the tow-path after the manner of kids all the world over. A small boy, dressed in what appears to be a striped flannel night-shirt, with a tiny skull-cap on his head, is driving them. He pulls his single garment up to his waist as he dances and pirouettes as if the joy of living were almost too much for him. He is enveloped in a cloud of dust raised by the goats, but he snatches handfuls of the dust from the ground and flings it in the air around as if he could never get enough of it!

"The Lady of Shalott," in Tennyson's poem, who watched in her mirror all who went down to Camelot, cannot ever have seen anything half so interesting as this.

Presently we meet a long string of fine-looking camels, one of them pure white; they are fastened by a connecting rope and so covered with loads of bristling twigs that each looks like a walking bush, out of which the great padded feet are planted with deliberate steps and the haughty heads swaying at the ends of the long necks stick out. It is the scrub of the cotton bush that they are carrying; you will see fields of it presently, some of it bursting into fluffy pods, for cotton growing is one of the most extensive and profitable of Egyptian industries. The twigs and branches are used as fuel by the people, who have a happy knack of letting nothing be wasted.

"I never!" exclaims the American. "If that isn't like them!" We are overtaking a second string of camels, precisely similar to the first, and similarly laden, stepping gingerly and protestingly in the opposite direction from the first, having just passed them. "Why couldn't they arrange things better?" demands the American. "If one lot is going this way and the other that, an exchange would have saved time and labour."

In America labour is costly and all sorts of inventions for saving time have been invented; in this eastern land time is of no value at all, and a man working all day in the fields is content to earn a shilling. Perhaps the contrast with their own country is the reason of the fascination Egypt has for Americans!

What are those strange-looking beasts mincing along like gigantic peacocks? As we draw nearer we see that they are camels too, each bearing a load of sword-bladed leaves, which hang down over their hindquarters exactly like the folded fan-tail of a peacock. Upon my word I never noticed it before, but a camel walks just like a peacock, with the same hesitating "Don't-care-a-hang-for-you" stride. The bundles so arranged hide the animals' hind legs and bring out the resemblance.

But what is it they are carrying? Not maize stalks this time, nor bushy cotton twigs, for these stalks are a dull crimson at the upper end. It is sugar-cane, which grows in quantities here, and forms a more profitable crop than maize. You will see it sold at the stations; the people buy it, and, breaking off a joint, eat it with pleasure.

We cannot tear ourselves away from this fascinating window even for a moment; far in the distance across the green fields and waving palm trees we see glimpses of the desert, looking pinkish-yellow, and rising up in it, changing with every mile we travel, are many pyramids, not only those famous ones at Gizeh we visited yesterday, but others stretching farther and farther away. You will notice that the favourite colour for the dress of the peasants, or fellaheen, as they are called, is a glorious blue, but that all the women are in black – most unsuitable of hues, as they live and move and have their being amid drab-coloured dust; khaki would be much better.

As our breakfast, though better than that in France, was nothing so very wonderful, we begin to feel hungry, and are ready to go along early to the luncheon-car; we had a good dinner in that one on the train coming up from Port Said to Cairo, and anticipate something of the same kind. As we get up the American remarks casually, "Best pull in your belts and have a smoke – there isn't any."

No luncheon-car! No means of getting any kind of refreshment on the train! And we, having started at eight, are in for a journey of fourteen hours! Lively this! It is one of the little incidental discomforts of travel! The American is in the same plight himself. But he found out soon after we started that there was no restaurant-car; it only runs three times a week, for the season hasn't begun yet!

We call the Egyptian attendant to find out if there is any prospect of buying anything on the way. He stands grinning very affably but doesn't understand a word of English. Presently, however, he seems to understand, and dashes off, to return triumphantly with a feather-brush in his hand with which he violently flops the seats of the carriages and all our personal belongings until we are choked and smothered with the dust.

In English fashion we have kept the windows open, not realising that in this country it is impossible, and that slowly we have been silted up with a layer of fine soft dust; but we didn't feel the inconvenience of it much until this idiot stirred it up and made it unendurable.

Having accomplished this great feat he stands still, grinning and holding out a broad palm. Officials on the trains are probably forbidden to utter the wicked word "Bakshish," meaning tips, but they can ask quite as well without it.

Having got rid of him, we turn in despair to the station at which we have just pulled up. There is a fine mingled crowd on the platform. Lying in the sun, awaiting their master's pleasure, are two beautifully kept white donkeys, with their hides clipped in neat patterns, very superior creatures indeed to what we know as donkeys, more like mules in size. A group of children, fascinated by our strange faces, draw nearer and gaze their fill unwinkingly; one poor little mite of about four has a mass of flies crawling all over its face, especially about the eyes. It never attempts to brush them off, for long habit has made it callous. Formerly very many children were so afflicted, and the crawling flies, carrying disease, made them blind; but since the British took the matter in hand the evil is much less. Yet so indifferent are the mothers, that in many cases even when lotion is supplied free for the children's faces they will not trouble to use it!

There is nothing eatable being sold in the station except fruit, but there seems plenty of that, and by the time the train starts again we find ourselves with a fine assortment in rich colours of purple and orange and scarlet. First there is a packet of dates which looks all right on the top, but turning them out we find the purple side of one had been placed carefully uppermost, and the rest are all hard, green, and unripe, not in the least like the sweet juicy dates we are accustomed to. The attendant, who is watching, scoops them up and devours them as if he hadn't been fed for a month. Then comes a bit of sugar-cane, stringy and sickly, which makes us feel as if we had bitten into a piece of sweet wood when we try it. That great purple pomegranate is, like all pomegranates, unsatisfactory and full of seeds, and though the little green limes are refreshing for the moment while we suck the juice, after a while our lips begin to smart as if they were raw, and we both keep on furtively wiping them. It is a tantalising feast, and the American smiles serenely as he smokes in his corner and refuses to have anything to do with it. The only thing we do get out of it are some really good green figs, which cannot, however, be eaten without shameless messiness, as they are so difficult to peel.

When the afternoon sun grows scorchingly hot the grinning attendant proves himself for once useful, by showing us that we can pull up sun-shutters with wooden slats outside the glass ones. He has indeed been anxious to pull them up all round the compartment ever since we started, and nothing but physical force has restrained him, for he cannot conceive how anyone could want to look out. Even now we keep down those on the sunless side, which grieves him deeply.

So all the afternoon we watch the glorious scenes changing in sunlight; we see the sailing boats, with their tapering white wings, laden with cargoes of straw, drifting up the canal, driven by the strong north wind; we pass innumerable villages, and some larger towns, where market-day has attracted vast crowds.

The small villages are indeed wonderful, and the first one excited us all three so much that we had to hurry to the window. Imagine a colony of last year's swallows' nests under the eaves, or a collection of ruined pigsties and sheds, only they are not ruins at all, but living, thriving villages with healthy people in them. The houses are all made of mud; a few are fashioned out of mud bricks, but many are merely of mud stuck and moulded together as a child would form a mud house with his hands. The doors and the holes for windows are crooked and lop-sided as they would be in a childish attempt. The roof is covered over with an untidy thatch of straw, thrown on anyhow, with piles of cotton scrub on the top of it. This scrub is for firing, and it is kept up there in the Egyptian's only storehouse; it is backed up by cakes of dried buffalo dung used for the same purpose. As it never rains the fuel is quite safe from damp.

Every man builds his own house as it pleases him, without regard to the style or position of his neighbour's, consequently the streets are narrow crooked passages of uneven levels; there is not a green thing in them, and the people live in dust and eat it and wallow in it. Here and there you can see a tray of flat cakes pushed out into the midst of the dust to bake in the sun and form a playground for the flies and the microbes, for the Egyptian has no respect for microbes, he is germ-proof; for generations he and his forefathers have drunk the Nile water, unfiltered and carried in goat-skins not too well cured. Yet the people are happy and the children apparently a gay set of youngsters. Little Gassim or Achmed, in the single unchanged and unwashed garment that covers their little brown bodies, dance and roll and sing and drive the loathly black buffaloes to the water and eat scraps of sugar-cane, and are as happy as the day is long. They work hard, it is true, from the time they can toddle, but so does everyone else, and all the animals do their share of toil, day in and day out. "I can't understand why they don't find a way of harnessing the turkeys," says the American sarcastically as we pass a lordly camel, stepping, with protest in every movement, alongside a sturdy bullock who helps to drag a primitive plough. The plough merely scratches the surface of the ground, but that is enough, for the Egyptian will never go deeper than he need.

We are getting very hungry indeed! Six hours more! How are we going to stand it?

Hurrah! A bit of luck! The American has been along the corridor and come across some friends who are getting out at the next station. They have presented him with the remains of a lunch-basket supplied by their hotel, and he is generously willing to share it with us. Never was prize-packet opened with greater eagerness; suppose it should only contain enough for one?

Amid the white wrappings of the open pannier we find slices of tongue, rolls of bread, chicken legs, hard-boiled eggs, and a bottle of soda-water!

Never did food taste better! We sit gnawing the chicken bones and blessing the American!

Meantime the sun falls and a splendour you never yet have imagined fills the air. Streaks of flaming colour shoot athwart the sky, bursting up behind the tufted palms; the eastern sky catches the reflection and shows softest blues and pinkest pinks in contrast. A veil of amber light hangs like a curtain overhead and changes to orange and again to apricot as the afterglow sweeps the sky before darkness falls like the curtain on a scene at the theatre.

CHAPTER VI

A MIGHTY MAN

Our beds face the windows, which open like high glass doors, French fashion; before retiring we set them wide, and close outside the long shutters made of slats of wood. In the morning we are awakened suddenly, almost at the same instant, by a red flame glowing between the slats as fire glows between the bars of a grate. Springing from our curtains we fling open the shutters, expecting to see a great conflagration, and behold, it is the sunrise!

The sun does not greet us in such boisterous fashion in England! Here it fills the sky with a blood-red radiance and lights up the palm groves in the garden below, where a mighty congregation of small birds are shrieking out their joy to greet the god of morning. There is an intensity in it all, in the flaming sky, and in the thrill of the birds' clarion that sends exhilaration into our veins and makes us feel it is good to be alive!

It is not long before we are out and around the garden – and what a garden! Strange coffee-coloured men in blue garments like smock frocks, with baggy blue trousers caught tightly round their ankles, appear and disappear noiselessly, their bare brown feet making no sound on the sanded paths. There is something unreal about it all, something that makes one think of the *Arabian Nights* and an enchanted garden. The hotel is called "The Winter Palace," and in England we should associate such a name with a vast artificially warmed glasshouse filled with broad-leaved plants of dark green; here, right overhead, is a tall bush covered with masses of sulphur-coloured flowers, shaped like tiny trumpets, hanging in festoons against a sky of glorious blue. Through plumed palms we catch glimpses of the spreading fingers of a deep red poinsettia; there is a pink frilled flower shooting toward the sky, so decorative that it looks exactly like those made of crinkled paper for decorations; this is the well-known oleander. The grass is so vividly green that it seems as if the greenness sprang away from the blades; as we draw near to it we see that it is not all matted together and interwoven, as is our grass, but is composed of separate blades, each one apart and upright, all together standing like a regiment of soldiers. It has to be sown every year freshly, for no roots can survive the long drought. Close by is a lawn of bare earth, and a boy of about your age, with a thin pathetic brown face, runs round and round it, shouting and waving a flapper to keep off the birds from the newly sown seed.

We are just going to plunge into a grove of trees – some acacias with leaves like delicate ferns, and others eucalyptus with long narrow leaves looking like frosted silver – when we find they are growing in a swamp, with the earth banked up all round to keep the water in!

Other flowers, familiar to us in England, such as roses, look rather pale and washed-out here in contrast with the flaming beauty of richest mauve and brightest orange worn by those which are at home in a hot country. As the sun gets strong we hear the drone of a swarm of great creatures like prodigious wasps with legs like stilts, which fly around the sweet-scented blooms. In ancient inscriptions this wasp, or hornet, was used as the sign of Northern or Lower Egypt. Across the flower-beds run miniature canals of stone, by means of which the water from the life-giving river is carried all over the ground, so that it can be easily watered; a very large part of the time of the blue-bloused gardeners is spent in watering. A garden which was watered from the sky would be a miracle to them.

We come back again to the hotel and pass through to the other or front entrance, where we catch sight of the majestic Nile, which we could not see in the darkness of our arrival last night. Standing on a high terrace, bounded by a parapet covered with riotous masses of magenta bougainvillea, we see the turquoise-blue river, flecked with boats carrying high, white, three-cornered sails; on the other side rise calm hills of orange-yellow. We shall visit those hills, for in them are buried some of the mightiest kings of Egypt, and the wild fastnesses form a truly royal burial-place, grander than any ordinary mausoleum or cemetery could ever be. On both sides of the river at one time stood the royal

city of Thebes, one of the best known of all the capitals of Egypt which sprang up from time to time in its age-long history.

If ever you "do" the ix. book of the *Iliad* in your schoolwork, you will find that Homer speaks of Thebes as having one hundred gates and possessing twenty thousand war-chariots! It extended for about nine miles along the river-bank.

After breakfast our first plunge into sight-seeing is a visit to the temple of Luxor, which faces the river just five minutes' walk along the street from the hotel. This is the very first Egyptian temple we have examined and it is astonishing how much we can learn from it. That mighty row of columns, larger and higher than any cathedral pillars you have ever seen, makes us feel like midgets. Standing close together the columns spring right into the clear sky, as there is no roof left. Not so very long ago they were covered up to the capitals in sand and débris. The poorer Egyptians had built their mud huts in and around them for generations, and when one hut crumbled away another was put up on the top of it, and thus the level of the accumulated earth grew higher and higher. Then some learned Frenchmen saw the wonder of the buried temple and bought the people out, persuading them to go elsewhere, and they gradually cleared away the rubbish until the original beauty of the temple was visible again. Even now, high up on all sides, you can see the depth of the earth surrounding it like cliffs, and on the top are squalid huts with dirty children and fluffy impudent goats and shrill-voiced, black-clad women, living their daily lives and looking down into the temple.

The ancient Egyptian writing was by signs – a bird meant one thing, a flower another, and a serpent another, and so on, but for a long time the meaning of it had been forgotten, and it was impossible for anyone to read these wonderful signs. But at the very end of the eighteenth century a great stone was found which had upon it an inscription written in Greek and in hieroglyphics, as the sign-writing was called, and also in another writing which used to be employed by the priests, and from this, before many years had passed, clever men were able to understand the language of signs and read the inscriptions on the temples, which told who had built them and much else. This stone was called the Rosetta Stone, after the place where it was found. It is now in the British Museum.

This was long before Luxor was unearthed, and the inscriptions were deciphered as they came to light; by their help it was found that the temple had been built chiefly by two kings, Amenhetep iii. and Rameses ii. who came after him, though not immediately. Rameses added to the existing work and carried it on. So far as we know all this was between three and four thousand years ago. In a village in England people are proud if they can point to any part of their parish church and say, "This is Norman work," and yet the Normans only came over to England less than nine hundred years ago! Go back more than three times that, and try to realise the age of this temple. And even this, as we know, is not old compared with the Pyramids! Doesn't it make us feel that, as a nation, we are rather young after all?

Long before we were a nation these mighty kings flourished in Egypt and lived in pomp and splendour. They each had a different name, of course, and more than one, but yet they were all Pharaohs, just as at one time in the Roman Empire each emperor was a Cæsar.

The Pharaohs had unlimited power in their own dominions, and forced their subjects to work for them as they pleased without giving them any payment. By some means we can't understand these mighty blocks of sandstone composing this temple and many others were brought from a place farther up the river. It is supposed that they were put on great rafts and floated down at flood-time, but the handling of them is still a mystery. The men who dealt with them had no steel tools, no driving force of steam or electricity at their backs, yet they reared buildings which we to-day, with all our appliances, think masterpieces.

Rameses ii. was called the Great; he reigned for over sixty years, and he has a peculiar interest for us because he is believed to have been the Pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites, while his son and successor, Menepthah, was the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

Walk up the great aisle of giant columns into the courtyard at the end, there, between the pillars, stand massive images of granite, most of them headless, but one perfect except for the ends of the fingers and toes.

Sit down on this fallen block and look at that marvellous image; it is the mighty Rameses himself! There is a repressed energy and indomitable purpose about him that tells in every line of a man who never let go and never allowed himself to be thwarted. His almond-shaped eyes and full lips, the proud tilt of his head, are not merely conventional, they are an actual likeness of the man taken from life. He is every inch a king. His successor, who was his thirteenth son, was probably of the same type, and one can well imagine his scornful indignation at being asked to yield up that nation of slaves, the Israelites, whom he treated as we would not treat animals nowadays. The miracle is that Moses was not instantly slain for his boldness in proposing it; he was, of course, screened by his relationship to Pharaoh's daughter, but that would have counted little had he not been protected by a power far above that of the king of Egypt.

Close down under the knee of the standing Rameses is the figure of a plump woman, his favourite wife, Nefertari. The Egyptians had the rather childish idea that size meant importance, and to them now, as well as then, women seemed of much less importance than men, so the wife was represented as being about as high as her husband's knee. In spite of this, however, women of royal blood were treated with great deference, and royal ladies enjoyed a freedom like that of western women to-day. They gave their opinions and transacted business and were seen in public. Many a king only sat securely on his throne because his wife had a better title to it than he had. This did not, however, prevent them from making women very often quite diminutive in size in their statues, though in some cases the king and queen are the same size and are shown seated side by side.

It is very quiet and beautiful here in the temple this Sunday morning; the natives themselves are not allowed to come in, and visitors only on production of a ticket costing twenty-four shillings, which admits to all the temples of Egypt; and, as it happens, there is no one but ourselves. The sparrows twitter overhead in the holes and crannies of the pillars, and the great grey and black crows wheel silently against the blue sky, throwing moving shadows on the honey-coloured columns.

If we walk round the back of these solemn statues we shall see that there is a quantity of deeply cut hieroglyphic writing on a great plaque at the back of each. The name of the king himself is always written enclosed in an oblong space called a cartouche; sometimes this cartouche is supported by two cobras, who are supposed to defend it. The rest of the writing tells of the deeds of the king and all the mighty feats that he performed.

Turning to the walls we find them covered with pictures, not coloured but done in outline by means of deep-cut clean lines. We see the king offering fruit to weird-looking beings with men's bodies and animals' heads – these were the Egyptian gods; there were numbers of them, far too many to remember, but here are a few: Anubis, the jackal-headed; Thoth, the stork-headed; Sekhet, a goddess with a lion's head (some say a cat's). Besides these there were others of great importance: Osiris, the god of the dead, and Isis, his wife – these were the father and mother of Horus, the hawk-headed god. But it was to the glory of Amen-ra, the king or chief of all the gods, who can be recognised in the pictures by two tall feathers like quills standing straight up on his head, that that particular temple was built.

On one of the walls we see a long row of men, all exactly similar, one behind the other – these are some of the numerous sons of Rameses making offerings. You soon notice that in spite of the vigorous and excellent outlines of these pictures there is something funny and stiff about them. That is because the Egyptians had an odd custom of drawing a person sideways, with his two feet in a straight line, one behind the other. No one stands like that in real life, and if you try it you will find how difficult it is not to fall over! Also, though the people they drew were invariably shown from the side, yet the artists used to make them look as if they were squared round in the upper part to show the chest and both shoulders, so that Egyptians in pictures always look oddly wedge-shaped, being

very broad at the top and narrow below. The eye was also put into the profile face as if it were seen from the front! Look at any typical Egyptian picture and you will soon pick out these peculiarities. It seems rather a pity they kept so rigidly to these silly notions, as they really drew extremely well; but no artist was original enough to dare to break away from the established custom!

Inside the temple walls all these scenes have something to do with the gods and the offerings made to them by the king, but come outside and on one of the finest bits of wall still standing you will see a most spirited battle-scene. Look at the king in his chariot with the plunging horses! He is drawing his bow and pursuing his enemies, who are dead and dying under his wheels, and fleeing before him. To show how much more important he was than the enemies he had himself made very large and the enemies shown very small. That is not quite our idea of honour and glory nowadays; we should think it more glorious to overcome enemies larger and stronger than ourselves! This afternoon we are going to visit a still larger and more wonderful temple, a mile or two away, called Karnak, and there you will see pictures of the king of that time holding the hair of his enemies' heads in the powerful grasp of his left hand while he prepares to strike off all their heads at one sweep with his sword.

The original entrance of Luxor temple does not face the river on the side we came in; to find it we have to scramble over heaps of rubbish to one end and there we see a great obelisk, a companion to the one which is now in the principal square of Paris, the Place de la Concorde, and we see also two huge buildings reared up on each side of the ancient entrance – these were called pylons and were always built in Egyptian temples. On festival days they were decorated with flags on tall staves and made very gay.

Then we go out again into the main street amid all the life of the place, and see men cantering past on gaily caparisoned donkeys; we note dancing, capering, gleeful children, guides in gorgeous gowns, shopmen of some mixed nationality from the Mediterranean, who run out of their shops and entreat you to come in. "Only look round, no paying, not wanting you buy," they lie. "Look and be pleased; there is no charge just only to look."

We stop at last and buy two fly-whisks with short bamboo handles and long silvery horsehair tails; of course they do look very smart, but we do not buy them just for that, but because they are useful.

As we have found already, nothing less than physical force suffices to remove an Egyptian fly, who sticketh closer than his English brother. No shake or puff will induce him to stir an eyelid, and yet he is quick on the wing and you rarely get him, sleepy as he appears! He doesn't buzz, and there generally appears to be only one of him, but if, by the aid of a fly-whisk, you get rid of him, another takes his place immediately!

CHAPTER VII

THE CITY OF KINGS

I think this is the gayest scene I have ever looked upon in my life. See those mahogany-coloured boatmen in their brilliant scarlet and white striped jerseys and blue petticoats, grinning so as to show all their milk-white teeth. The boats are apple-green and scarlet, and they are reflected in the clear still water, and the dragoman, who marshals all the party into them, is a very splendid person indeed, in a long overcoat of turquoise blue cloth as soft and fine as a glove, with a striped gown of yellow Egyptian silk underneath.

We are off with a party of Cook's tourists to explore the Tombs of the Kings on the other side of the river. It is a pretty stiff day's work, so we are up early, and it is only half-past eight now. As we near the other side of the river we see an excited group of donkey-boys who have brought their animals over earlier, and now stand expectant, looking like a fringe of blue beads.

"Lily best donkey – Lily name for Americans, Merry Widow for Engleesh – "

"Come, lady, with me, Sammy best donkey in Egypt, verry good, Sammy my donkey, best donkey – "

"Kitchener, lady, best donkey in Egypt, me speak verry good Engleesh, alla way gallop."

And so on in a continuous yell. The dragoman shouts out the numbers of the donkeys, and helps the ladies of the party to mount. Some ride on side-saddles, others, unused to any form of riding, prefer to get up astride, which they find difficult in the tight modern skirts. One German girl, after a frantic attempt, has to give it up, and sits wobbling on her saddle with her arms round the donkey-boy's neck, agonisingly appealing to him not to move! A very stout lady in black is lifted on to her mount by the united efforts of the dragoman and two donkey-boys, and, held in position by the boys, moves off, threatening a convulsive landslide to one side or the other at every step.

We are lucky in securing two fine greyish-white animals, almost as large as mules and very well fed and kept; yours is named "Sirdar" and has a single blue bead slung on a string round his neck as a charm, while mine, "Tommy Raffles," has a rattling chain of yellow and blue beads and much scarlet wool in his harness. You won't have much difficulty, I know, as you have been used to a pony since you could walk.

At first the soft powdery sand makes the going stiff, and we have much difficulty in restraining our boys, who run behind, from smacking or prodding the donkeys as they plough through. These boys are very proud and fond of their donkeys and treat them well, but it is the ambition of every donkey-boy to see his donkey head the cavalcade, and he is ready to die of envy and mortification if any other boy's donkey gets in front of him. We pass through clouds of dusty earth and then turn on to uneven narrow ways between tall green stalks of growing dhurra, stuff which looks like maize, except that it has a heavy head of grain which is ground up for making rough bread for the poorest people.

Along by a canal, over a bridge and a railway line we gallop, our animals going well. Their trot is impossible, as we soon find, but the easy loping canter delightful. We pass many black-clad women working in the fields, with crowds of bright-eyed friendly children who murmur "'Shish" in the vain hope that we may throw them some money. Then we see herds of black goats in among the cut stalks, and a tethered baby camel, who looks at us with innocent wondering eyes.

Far off rise up from the plain two mighty seated statues, the Colossi, set up by Amenhetep iii. as part of a temple now vanished. Presently we all stop to see another temple, interesting enough, but not so interesting as those already visited at Luxor and Karnak.

The dragoman, whose work is not easy, brings up the rear of the cavalcade, having managed to keep even behind the fat lady, who has stuck to the slippery surface of her saddle with many a desperate plunge firmly resisted by her escort.

The dragoman describes the temple fluently and intelligently, first in English, then in French, and adds a little explanation in German for the benefit of two men of that race who have talked loudly in their own guttural tongue all the time he has endeavoured to make the rest of the party hear. The dragoman does not reel his words off as if he were repeating a lesson, as, alas, so many of the guides at our own cathedrals do. He is a clever man, well educated and capable. It has taken him years to learn all he knows, and it is only the clever boys who can become good dragomans. One of our donkey-boys, a bright little fellow who speaks far better English than most of his companions, tells us, "I am going to be a dragoman." He says it deliberately, with a pause between each word to get them correctly. "Thus I speak always with the English and the Americans. To the English I speak English, which is what I have learned, but when I am with Americans I can talk to them in their own tongue too."

Laughing, we mount and are off again.

We are now penetrating into the great hills of sandstone we saw afar off from the hotel. The road winds into a gorge, and at each turn displays more vivid beauty. We feel a strange joy rising within us, so that we would like to sing or shout at the tops of our voices. The brilliance of the air shows up every line in the great precipices of orange-yellow, streaked with red and purple, which rise against a sky of thrilling blue. There is not a blade of grass or a leaf to be seen in these vast solitudes, only the massive stones, broken and split and scattered, lie in the fierce sun or black shadow. We can imagine these defiles looking much the same when three or four thousand years ago the funeral procession of one of the mighty Pharaohs wound its way into the heart of the mountains, carrying the man who had never known opposition or denied himself his slightest wish. They were very magnificent these processions, composed of hundreds of people who carried all sorts of things – furniture, chariots, boats, animals, fruit and flowers – with tremendous ceremony.

It is a longish ride before we alight again, and leaving the donkeys under a slight straw shelter penetrate into the fastnesses of the hills.

How many of these rock-tombs were made here will probably never be known, but year by year more are uncovered. The first we step into is like a large well-lighted cave cut out of a cliff-side, from it opens another cave-like room, and from that another, each sloping downward and the whole series giving the impression of a series of puzzle-boxes fitting into one another and then drawn out. The walls are covered with pictures, paintings on plaster, not outline pictures like those we saw in the temples, but filled in with blue and green, orange and terra-cotta, laid on thickly, and as fresh as the day they were done. Ever descending we pass on until we reach the last chamber, where the great sarcophagus or coffin of the king was placed right up against the face of the rock. The sarcophagus might be a mighty block of granite, enclosing a wooden case, and that again another case, probably carved and gilt, and finally, as a kernel, there was the body of the king, preserved and dried by spices, lying awaiting the final resurrection. The Egyptians believed in a future world, but they could not imagine a future world without there being human bodies in it such as we have now, so they took infinite trouble in preserving the dead body that it might be ready for its time of call. Most of the sarcophagi from these tombs have been removed and taken to the museum at Cairo, but in one to which we penetrate, hewn out at a slope so steep that we have difficulty in keeping our feet as we slither down, the mummy has been replaced and is left uncovered.

Lit up by electric light we see King Amenhetep ii., with his skin blackened to a parchment, drawn tightly over his chiselled aristocratic features. In the dome-shaped forehead, the Roman nose, and the tightly compressed lips there is an expression of infinite disdain, as if he, in his time the mightiest ruler in the world and the leader of civilisation, knew that now he was exposed to the gaze of a party of outer barbarians whose national histories were but of mushroom growth. This king struck terror into the hearts of his enemies; he raided the land of Syria, slew seven chiefs with his own hand and brought them back to Thebes, hanging head downward from the bows of his boat!

The very day after a king ascended the throne he used to begin hewing out the sepulchre where he should lie. The scenes drawn on the walls show what he expected to find in the other world. We see a pair of scales with the heart of the dead man in one balance and a feather in the other; a monkey sits on the top and adjusts the weight. The heart must weigh the feather exactly, for to be over-righteous was as bad as being wicked! The dead man also had to pass before forty-two judges, who each examined him searchingly as to whether he had committed one particular sin. As one of the party remarked in an awe-struck voice, "And if he did pass them all safely and another started up and asked him if he ever told a lie he'd be done, for no man could deny that he had committed any of the forty-two principal sins and remain truthful!"

To accompany the soul to the other world many things used to be buried in the tombs, clothes and food and utensils and weapons, and, thanks to this custom, numberless things have been saved to show us how the ancient Egyptians lived. These, however, have mostly been taken to Cairo for safe keeping. But here in Amenhetep's tomb one thing has been left. In a small side chamber, with the light falling full upon them, are three mummies, each with a hole in the skull and a gash on the breast, showing that they were the king's slaves, killed in order that their souls might accompany him and serve him beyond the tomb!

They lie there with their hair still on their heads, and even the false hair, they used to increase it, showing; on their faces is a ghastly grin. We wonder if they submitted quietly, proud of having been chosen, or if each fought fiercely for the life which belonged to him and was not any man's to take away.

It is very hot and close down in the rock-hewn chamber, and we are glad enough to stumble up and out again, though we are blinded by the sunshine as we emerge.

The next part of the day is the hardest of all, for we scramble up a mountain-side to gain a splendid view of gorges and valleys on one side and the flat plain spreading to the Nile on the other. The view is indescribable; from lemon-yellow to orange and saffron are the hills, with blue-grey shadows in their folds. Right opposite is one absolutely perpendicular, with immense rounded columns looking like giant organ pipes rising on its face. A fresh wind is blowing, and when we mount our donkeys, which have come round to meet us another way, and ride along a path a few feet wide, with no fence of any kind and a drop of some hundreds of feet on one side, we are devoutly thankful that the German girl and the stout lady went round the other and longer way by the valley!

Over the summit the donkeys are set free to get down the steep descent as best they may, and they are as sure-footed as goats, but we who follow find considerable difficulty as the loose stone and sand fall away in miniature avalanches from beneath our slipping feet and we get very hot. We are sheltered here from that fresh wind which is such a joy in Egypt, the sun is at its height, and we have done a good morning's work already after an early start. There, far below, looking like a doll's house, is the rest-house where we lunch, and beside it two of the men of the Mounted Police Camel Corps in khaki on their long-legged beasts.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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