

CLEOPATRA



MAKERS OF HISTORY SERIES

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THE VALLEY OF THE NILE.

THE story of Cleopatra is a story of forbidden love—its uncontrollable impulses, its intoxicating joys, its reckless course, and the dreadful ruin in which it invariably ends.

Cleopatra was an Egyptian by birth, but a Greek by ancestry. Thus, while Alexandria and the Nile delta formed the background of her life, it was the blood of Macedon which flowed in her veins, and her character was marked by the genius, the courage, and the impulsiveness of her ancestors. The particular events of her history, on the other hand, were determined by the physical circumstances of her location.

Egypt has always been one of the most remarkable countries on the globe. It is a long, narrow valley of green fruitfulness, completely isolated from the rest of the world by the impassable deserts which surround it.

Indeed, the very existence of Egypt is an extraordinary phenomenon.

The most extensive rainless region of the earth is a vast tract of land extending from northern Africa to southwestern Asia, from the Sahara Desert to the Arabian Desert. The whole expanse is marked by the absence of vegetable and animal life, on account of the absence of rain. It is one vast empty plain, almost completely flat, a thousand miles wide and five thousand miles long. The only interruption is the valley of the Nile.

There are, in fact, three valleys which extend through this desert, though only one of them breaks up its barrenness in any considerable way. The valleys all run north to south. The easternmost is the Red Sea, and though it is full of water, there are scarcely any indications of life on its shores. The westernmost of the three valleys is only a shallow depression in the land marked by a line of oases. There are a few springs here and there, which give some fertility to the valley; the large oasis of Siweh, in which stood the famous temple of Jupiter Ammon, was said to have once contained a population of eight thousand. Thus, while the easternmost valley was deep enough to admit the ocean to flow freely into it, the westernmost was so shallow that it only allowed a limited water supply through the springs. Only the third and central valley now remains to be described.



By looking at a map, the reader will see that south of this great desert lie ranges of mountains in Abyssinia, called the Mountains of the Moon. These mountains are near the equator and bring down great torrents of rain during certain seasons of the year. The land to the south is elevated, and so this rainwater flows north through the desert to the Mediterranean, two thousand miles from where it fell. The river thus created is the Nile.

If the rain in the Abyssinian mountains had been constant and steady, the stream would have created very little fertility in the desert through which it flowed. Its banks, perhaps, would have been fringed with green, but that is as far as the water would have been able to reach. But the flow of the water is not steady. During a certain season of the year, the rains flood the mountains where they fall. Immense torrents stream down the

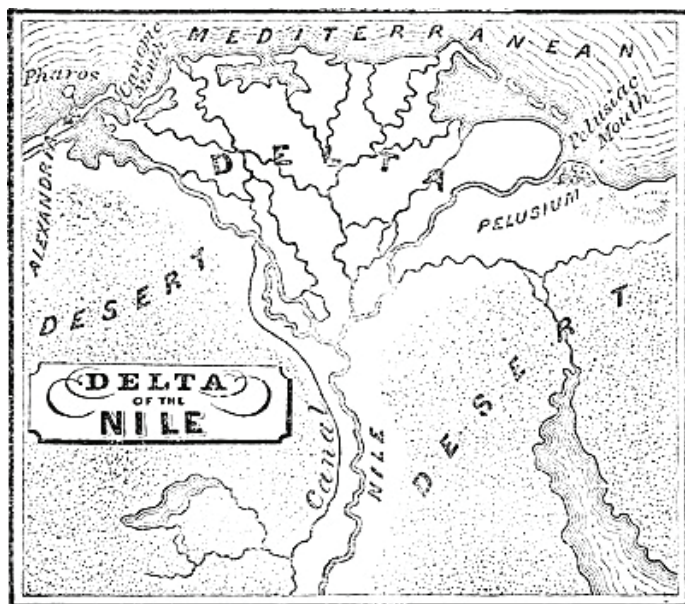
mountainsides, plains turn into swamps, and swamps turn into lakes. In a word, the whole country is flooded and the water forms a vast lake over the Egyptian desert as it flows to the sea. This lake is ten miles wide and a thousand miles long. At length, the rains cease, but it still takes months for the water to run off and leave the valley dry. As soon as it is gone, rich vegetation springs up from the ground which has been thus flooded.

The fact that the valley of the Nile is underwater for a quarter of the year has prevented forests from taking root there. It has also kept the wild beasts from making their homes there, for there is no shelter for them. It is as if the valley was designed especially for mankind. There were no creatures to drive out, no forests to clear: everything was ready for immediate cultivation of the land.

For these or perhaps other reasons, Egypt has been occupied by man from ancient times. The oldest records of the human race, made three thousand years ago, already speak of Egypt as being ancient when they were written. Tradition is silent, and legend tells us nothing of the origins of these people. Here stand the oldest monuments in the world, and they are merely the results of a thin layer of fertile soil left upon the sands by a fleeting summer shower.

The most important part of the Nile flood plain is the northern portion, where the valley widens and opens toward the sea, forming a triangular plain of about one hundred miles in length on each side, over which river flows in a great number of creeks and channels. The whole area is a vast meadow, intersected everywhere with slow-flowing streams and full of the most

enchancing scenes of abundance and beauty. This region is called the Delta of the Nile.



The Delta of the Nile is so level and so low that the land seems almost a continuation of the surface of the sea, but instead of white-crested waves, it is covered with broad tracts of waving grain and gentle hills crowned with villages.

The easternmost channel through the Delta is called the Pelusiatic branch. There was an ancient city named Pelusium near its mouth which was the first Egyptian city reached by those travelling from the east by land along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. As it marked the eastern border of the country, it became a point of great importance, and is often mentioned in ancient history.

The westernmost mouth of the Nile, on the other hand, was called the Canopic mouth. The distance along the coast from the Canopic mouth to Pelusium was about a hundred miles. The outline of the coast has always been very irregular and the water very shallow. Banks of sand extend into the sea, while the sea forms countless inlets and lagoons into the land. Along this irregular boundary the waters of the Nile and the Mediterranean have kept up an eternal war. The river brings the sands down and the sea drives them back so that the shoreline has always been extremely dangerous and difficult for men to access.

The valley of the Nile was thus entirely isolated and secluded from the rest of the world. By land, it was surrounded by deserts, and the shoals and sandbars made it very difficult to approach by sea. Here it remained for ages under the rule of its own native kings. Its population was peaceful and industrious. Its scholars were famous throughout the world for their learning, their science, and their philosophy. It was in these ages, before other nations invaded Egypt's peaceful seclusion, that the Pyramids were built and the enormous monoliths carved.

During these remote ages, Egypt was the land of perpetual abundance. There was always grain in Egypt, wherever else famine might rage. The neighboring nations, therefore, found their way there across the deserts when driven by hunger. At length, the Persian monarchs took the same route and, coming to Pelusium, overran and conquered the country. At last, about two hundred and fifty years before Cleopatra, Alexander the Great subdued the Persian empire and took possession of

Egypt, along with the other Persian provinces. When Alexander's empire was divided after his death, Egypt fell to one of his generals, named Ptolemy. A long line of rulers succeeded him, known in history as the dynasty of the Ptolemies, Greek princes ruling over an Egyptian realm. Cleopatra was the daughter of the eleventh in the line.

The capital of the Ptolemies was Alexandria. Until the time of Alexander's conquest, Egypt had no seaport. There were several landing-places along the coast, but no proper harbor. In fact, Egypt then had so little commercial interaction with the rest of the world that she scarcely needed a port. Alexander's engineers, however, found a point not far from the Canopic mouth of the Nile where the water was deep and the anchorage was protected by an island. Alexander founded a city there, which he named after himself. He completed the harbor with artificial excavations and embankments. A lofty lighthouse was built to guide the galleys of the Mediterranean. A canal was dug to connect the port with the Nile, and warehouses were erected to hold merchandise. In a word, Alexandria at once became a great capital of trade. For several centuries, it was the seat of the Ptolemies' government and still remains one of the principal points of commerce in the Mediterranean today.



THE PTOLEMIES.

THE founder of the dynasty of the Ptolemies—the rulers who took over Egypt at the death of Alexander the Great—was a Macedonian general in Alexander's army. The circumstances of his birth and the events which led him to enter the service of Alexander were somewhat peculiar. His mother, whose name was Arsinoë, was a personal friend of Philip, king of Macedon, father of Alexander. Philip at length gave Arsinoë in marriage to a nobleman named Lagus. Shortly thereafter, Ptolemy was born. Philip treated the child with the same kindness he had shown toward the mother, and he grew up with as much attention as if he had been the son of the king himself, going on to hold positions of considerable responsibility and power.

There was a province in the Persian empire called Caria, in the southwestern part of Asia Minor. The