

The plan of Cambridge, and with it the Church, being given up, and his later training being too exclusively mathematical for him to think of Oxford, Lane joined his elder brother Richard (afterwards renowned for his skill in lithography, which was recognized by the Royal Academy in the election to an associateship) in London, where he spent some time in engraving. Although this profession was also shortly abandoned, the years devoted to it were not thrown away. The taste for art which he had inherited with the Gainsborough blood and which his mother, who had spent a great part of her girlhood in her uncle's studio, spared no endeavour to foster, aided by the mechanical training of the graver, was afterwards turned to admirable results in Egypt. Side by side with his engraving, however, was the growing passion for Eastern things. Lane could not by his nature be idle for a moment, and the hours unfilled by his art were given up to hard reading. To such an extent was this zeal for study carried, that he began to grudge the time necessary for food and exercise. The result of inattention to the ordinary rules of health was a state of weakness that could offer but a faint resistance to the attack of typhus fever which now assailed him. With difficulty escaping with his life, he found his health unequal to the sedentary habits of the engraver. A man who was so weak, partly from the exhaustion of chronic bronchitis, and partly from the effects of the fever, that he sometimes could not walk along a street without clinging for support, was not fit to bend over copper-plate all day. He therefore determined to adopt some other way of life.

As early as 1822, Eastern studies had more than merely attracted Lane's interest. A manuscript grammar of colloquial Arabic in his handwriting bears this date: and he must have been studying some time before he could attempt a grammar of Arabic, even though it is only an abridgement of other works. From this year or earlier dates that severe devotion to the language and character of the Arabs which for more than half a century filled every moment of his studious life.

It was this taste for Oriental matters, seconded by his weak health, which could ill withstand a northern winter, that determined Lane to visit Egypt. Another motive may have been the hope of a post in the service of the British Government, which, he was informed by those who were qualified to speak, he stood a good chance of obtaining if he made himself well acquainted with Easterns at home. Whatever the motives, in 1825 Lane left England for the first of his three visits to the land of the Pharaohs.