

1825—1828.

THE FIRST VISIT TO EGYPT.

*The "Description of Egypt."*

ON Monday the 18th July 1825 Lane embarked on board the brig "Findlay," 212 tons, bound for Alexandria, and on the 24th he lost sight of the coast of England. The voyage, which occupied two months, was not altogether uneventful. On the 2nd September the "Findlay" nearly foundered in a hurricane off Tunis. The master seems to have been an incapable person, and no one else of the crew understood navigation. The night was starless; the sea ran so high that the heavy storm-compass in the binnacle could not traverse and was unshipped at every lurch; and, driven along between a lee shore and a dangerous reef, without compass, and the main topmast carried away, the ship seemed doomed to destruction. It was at this critical moment that the captain entreated Lane to take the helm. Fortunately navigation had formed part of his mathematical studies: but he was little more than a boy and this was his first voyage; he might well have shrunk from the responsibility. But he went at once to the wheel, where he had to be lashed, or he had been washed overboard by the seas that swept momentarily over the deck. He had noticed the bearings of the lightning, and by the flashes he steered. At last the moon rose, and by her light the wreck was cleared away and steering was less hazardous. As day dawned the wind abated, and Lane was able to bring the ship safely into Malta harbour on the morning of the 4th. Here she remained six days for repair; and meanwhile the crew mutinied, seemingly not without reason; and Lane was aroused one morning with a shot through his pillow. He had come prepared for dangers in Egypt, and these accidents by the way did not discompose him. On Monday the 19th September the shores of the Delta came in sight: first the ruined tower of Aboo-Seer rose above the horizon; then "a tall distant sail," which proved to be the Great Pillar of Alexandria; then high hills of rubbish, crowned with forts; and at last the ships in the Old Harbour. The "Findlay" was ordered to enter the New Harbour, and there cast anchor in the midst of a shoal of Rosetta boats.

Although it was late in the afternoon and little could be seen before dark, Lane was too impatient to wait for the next day. He landed filled with profound emotion, feeling, he writes, like an Eastern bridegroom about to lift the veil of his as yet unseen bride. For his was not the case of an ordinary traveller. "I was not visiting Egypt merely for my amusement; to examine its pyramids and temples and grottoes, and after satisfying my curiosity to quit it for other scenes and other pleasures: but I was about to throw myself entirely among strangers, among a people of whom I had heard the most contradictory accounts; I was to adopt their language, their customs, and their dress; and in order to make as much progress as possible in the study of their literature, it was my intention to associate almost exclusively with the Muslim inhabitants."

The first sight that met his eye was singularly impressive. It was the time of afternoon prayers, and the chant of the Muëddin had just ceased as they landed. Muslims were performing the ablutions at the sea, or, this done, were praying on the beach, with that solemn gravity and with those picturesque and striking attitudes which command the respect of all standers-by. Lane always felt a strong veneration for a Muslim at his prayers, and it was a singularly auspicious moment for an enthusiastic Englishman to set