

THE PYRAMIDS AND THE OLD EMPIRE OF MEMPHIS.

The large number of ruined temples in Ethiopia and Nubia led the earlier writers of our century to seek the origins of



The Great Pyramid.

the most tempting to invasion, and the most open to the destructions of foreign conquest. The proximity of the Delta to invading populations from Arabia and Syria made it peculiarly exposed to attack. On this account, the Mohammedan Arabs, in the 7th century A. D., settled and increased especially here. From their time dates the entire destruction of ancient city ruins in the lower valley. These ruins have been used as building quarries by the new settlers, and have in this manner disappeared.

Only the Pyramids, near the head of the Delta, have been able to withstand this process of destruction, and thus they are interesting, not only for themselves, but also because they represent the earliest epoch of Egyptian history and architecture—the period when Memphis, at the head of the Delta, was the capital.

The Pyramids were the tombs of the kings of Memphis—the kings of the Old Empire. The kings of the New Empire, whose capital was Thebes, were buried in rock tombs still to be seen there in the mountain-sides. The important royal names of this period

Egyptian civilization in this direction. But the same explanation accounts at once for the disappearance of temple ruins in the lower Nile valley, and for the fact that the oldest Egyptian civilization centered there. The superior fertility of the Delta, and the large expanse of cultivable ground, made this portion of the country the seat of earliest civilization, and also, in later times,

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