

ture, science, and the mechanic arts exercised a great influence upon later nations. Indeed, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of these early steps in the world's civilization.

II. ANCIENT EGYPT

The Valley of the Nile.—The second great people of the Oriental world were the Egyptians. Although far removed from the Babylonians, and for a long time unacquainted with them, the ancient Egyptians were not behind their distant rivals in developing the arts of civilized life. The early progress of Egypt was due to the favourable conditions furnished by the river Nile. What the Euphrates was to Babylonia, the Nile was to Egypt.

The Nile is one of the longest rivers of the world; rising in the distant lakes of central Africa, it pursues a course of about 4,000 miles on its way to the sea. But the part of the valley occupied by the Egyptian people extended only about six hundred miles from the mouth of the river—to the rapids called the "first cataract," on the borders of Ethiopia. The valley is enclosed on either side by low ranges of mountains, which furnish stone suitable for building; and it is well to notice that this abundant supply of stone gave to the Egyptians a great advantage over the Babylonians, who were obliged to use the less durable materials, clay and brick, for building. The valley of the Nile is only about seven or eight miles in width—except at the Delta, where it spreads out into an open plain. Not only has this valley been cut by the Nile, but its fertility is due to the annual overflow of the river, for the climate is dry and rain rarely falls. This river is also the great highway of Egypt, affording a ready means of communication from one part of the country to another. The fertile soil of Egypt was especially suitable for the raising of vegetables and grain. Rice, oats, barley, and wheat grew there in great abundance, so that the country became the granary of the ancient world.

Periods of Egyptian History.—Formerly the chief sources of our knowledge of Egypt were, first, the Greek historians,