

SKETCHES IN THE ORIENT.

EGYPT AND THE EGYPTIANS.

PTOLOMY had served as a general under Alexander, upon whose death he was made governor of Egypt, and afterwards he made himself king. He was well fitted to deal with his people. During his rule the country reached the height of its prosperity. He extended great privileges to all who would settle in Alexandria, whether Jews or Greeks, which drew crowds to the place. Under his auspices arose the Tower of Pharos and the magnificent temple of Serapis. He founded an academy of learned men, who devoted themselves to the study of philosophy and their sciences. For their use, he made a collection of choice books, which grew under his successors to 700,000 volumes. All books that he could lay hands on were seized and copied, the transcript returned to the owner, and the original placed in the library. If these books had not been burned, the world would doubtless be wiser to day than it is.

This Ptolemy was the only good one of his race. He was simple in life and manner—borrowing his neighbor's plate when he gave a large entertainment; prudent, just, clement and easy of access. At the time of his death he held several countries under the dominion of Egypt—and now Egypt pays tribute to the Sultan. Ever since the death of this wise Ptolemy, Alexandria has been declining in population and importance. His successors generally, with perhaps the exception of his son and grandson, were given to dissipation, intrigue, quarrels and cruelty.

In quitting the city the traveler feels as if Alexandria were but a sham Egypt, and he sets his sails for the breeze that shall waft him to where Isis sits enthroned, even Cairo: that is, he buys a ticket and goes by rail, as prosaically as if we were on the Pennsylvania Central. The first glimpses of Kahira, "the city of victory," are seen through the sycamore and fig trees with which its environs are clothed; through them here and there one sees the promise of further beauty in graceful minarets, glancing domes, and tall palms, which is hardly realized on near approach. Cairo being no exception to the rule that all towns of the East look best at a distance. Still there is enough and to spare within its walls to make a sojourn here attractive.

The change from East to West is great, and here Oriental life finds its highest expression; in the flowing drapery and majestic movement of the inhabitants, in camels reposing in the shade of olive trees or drinking at marble fountains, in groups of swarthy Egyptians in rich apparel, sipping coffee and smoking nargilehs, in the atmospheric effects of this remarkable climate, and the odors of the pomegranate and the orange wafted on a breeze as gentle as a maiden's whisper. On coming here, one feels like old Hafiz when he says: "Let us be crowned with roses, let us drink wine, and break up the tiresome old roof of heaven into new forms."

The bed of the Nile, like that of the lower Mississippi, is higher than the valley through which it passes. Warburton said: "The Nile's bed is a sort of saving bank by means of which the deposits of four thousand years have enabled him to rise in the world and to run along a causeway of his own."