

THE PYRAMIDS.

BY REV. CHARLES S. NEWHALL.

"Harry, if all goes well this will be one of the white days of our trip. Think of at last climbing the pyramids! A year ago, at home, you had no reason for supposing you would ever see them. They seemed farther away than the moon—which at any rate was in sight; yet here we are ready to mount the two donkeys which have the glory, that they do not appreciate, of being the last of the long succession of our carriers between New Haven and the base of Cheops.

"Come on. There is Hassan striding down the pathway, majestic in black tasselled fez and loose robe of silk, baggy trousers, white stockings, and yellow slippers. He turns out of the way for nobody. He might be owner of a good part of Cairo or the whole of it, or partner of the khedive. See him cuff the donkey-boys. They seem quite in awe of him."

"Good morning, Hassan; why are you so free with your fists?"

"It's the best way, sir. It's the only way to get along with the natives, sir."

"Do you think so? But while you are with us don't be quite so ready to use that method."

"I won't, sir."

Soon they were mounted and off for the Pyramids. Out of the city, across the Nile bridge, westward they went.

They were hardly more than clear of the city, before they saw away in front of them, still and massive and clear cut against the sky, the familiar picture, the original of what they had so often seen in books and on canvas.

Were they disappointed in this distant view of them? Indeed they were!

"O Cousin Will," exclaimed Harry, "I don't know but I would rather never have seen them at all than to have seen them so much less than I anticipated! 'Mountains of rock' indeed! 'wonders of the ages!' I feel as though it were a fraud, as though somebody had been cheating me. Hardly that though. It is more that I feel just sorry and disappointed. Don't you feel so, Cousin Will?"

"Yes, I do. And yet, when we come to think about it, they must be farther away than they seem to us to be in this clear atmosphere; and if that is so, we can easily understand why they appear now to be so small."

Two hours' ride from Cairo, with frequent interruptions from unrepaired paths, brought the travellers to the foot of the great hills of stone.

A crowd of Arabs flocked around them as they approached, some of them eager to take charge of the donkeys, others as eager to be hired as guides and assistants to the top, others trying to sell little mementoes—seals and charms and idols—which they declared they had found in the tombs, but which more likely were all of English make.

The Arabs were quieted somewhat and induced to give space with the help of Hassan. Hassan they seemed to know well and to look at askance. Plainly, besides having no liking for him, they were rather afraid of him.

The travellers rested a while on their blankets spread over the sand before undertaking the ascent.

"What do you say now, Harry, to the height of the Pyramids?" asked Will, as they lay looking up the more than four hundred and fifty feet of rock stairs that sloped above them.

"I say this is very much more like what I expected, yet it isn't quite all that I hoped for. However, I don't complain. I am satisfied, and I imagine that before we get to the top I will be more than satisfied. It will be like climbing a small mountain. Whew! wouldn't it have been a great place once for sliding down hill when it was covered smoothly from top to bottom with polished stone! I believe I shall be half afraid now of falling, and having not a slide, but a very bumping roll, before we are through. How uneven the steps are, Cousin Will! From two feet to four or five, aren't they? And the color of the rock! I thought it was dark, and instead it is almost white—a sort of cream color."

"Yes, it is all made of a light limestone, excepting in places along the passages and in the lining of the inner chambers; there a very hard granite-like rock is used.

Well, are you rested? If you are, now for the climb. How much help do you want, Harry?"

"The Arabs seem to think that I want them all. Do you suppose I really need any of them?"

"Indeed you do. We will have two of them apiece. They will help by climbing ahead and then pulling us up step by step. We will dispense with the third fellow who wants to go behind and push."

"Now you four men—you and you and you and you, understand—just you four and no others, are the men we hire; and understand again, only when we are through with you will we pay you. The rest of you can go along if you want the climb, but not one backsheesh will the rest of you get from us."

Nevertheless a good part of the whole tribe did go with them to the very top. It was in the vain hope that their frequent offers of help and of water and of food

a long rest. It seemed to them that from this point the pyramid was more awe-inspiring than from any other place. Now there was a great slope below them as well as above them. They were like a little group of ants clinging to a huge wall. Here at last, where they had least expected it, they found that the sense of immensity and grandeur and majesty was all and more than they had ever anticipated.

Presently they were climbing again, and soon they were at the summit. The apex of the pyramid has been broken away. The top now is a roughly-levelled platform a few feet square. Looking down and off from this height the travellers could see their donkeys at the foot of the pyramid like mice and the men like pigmies; they could mark the clear-cut line where the sand curved in and out against the green of the fertile Nile valley. On the one side of them the bare desert stretched away as far as they could see, shining yellow in the

"Yes, indeed. And how careful we ought to be to build aright!"

The descent was easy, comparatively, and rapid. They reached the base without mishap. Then, after resting an hour, Will said:

"Now it is time to explore the interior of the pyramid. We will find the 'King's Chamber.'"

They climbed to the entrance in the side of the pyramid, a dark hole opening into the stone. Once probably there was an imposing entrance-way. A narrow passage leads beyond. They crept along carefully, with an Arab in front carrying a dim candle, and a line of Arabs behind. Much of the way they had to stoop as they went under the low ceiling. In one place a shaft, black and deep, opened directly in their path. They could advance only by climbing past it along a narrow shelf at the side.

"Evidently," remarked Harry, "whoever built this did not mean it to be a thoroughfare."

"Indeed they did not," said Will. "They worked hard to hide their inner chambers and to secure them for ever from all possible intrusion. If the pyramids are sepulchres, their builders meant that no intruder should ever find and disturb their embalmed bodies after they were once entombed."

At the very centre of the pyramid the tunnel which they had been following opened suddenly into what in the dimness seemed to be a very lofty and spacious chamber.

"For one franc I illuminate," exclaimed an Arab.

"Illuminate, then," answered Will.

The fellow had picked up somewhere a bit of magnesium. As he touched it with a match, and the light from it flashed out clear and strong, the walls and ceiling of the chamber seemed to approach, as though to shut them in and make an undesired sarcophagus for them all. Really the place is a room some 24 feet long by 17 wide and 10 high, lined smoothly throughout with great blocks of granite-like stone.

The light gleamed brightly for only a few seconds; then the sarcophagus seemed darker than ever. That Arab was a fraud, but the bargain had been made and he received his promised reward.

Near the centre of the chamber, and the only thing in it, is a large block of stone, hollowed and fitted to receive a cover. There have been various theories as to what it is. Probably it is a sarcophagus and once contained the body of the royal builder of the pyramid.

There was nothing to keep them long in this uncanny place. The candle was burning low; the air was heavy with the fumes from the "illumination." They were ready to get outside as soon as possible.

Suddenly there was a light puff. The candle was out. They were in absolute darkness. They could not see an inch before them. Harry had been roaming about the chamber, but just then, fortunately, he was standing near Will. Will clutched him; then they waited.

The silence was as absolute as the darkness.

But in a minute a voice spoke.

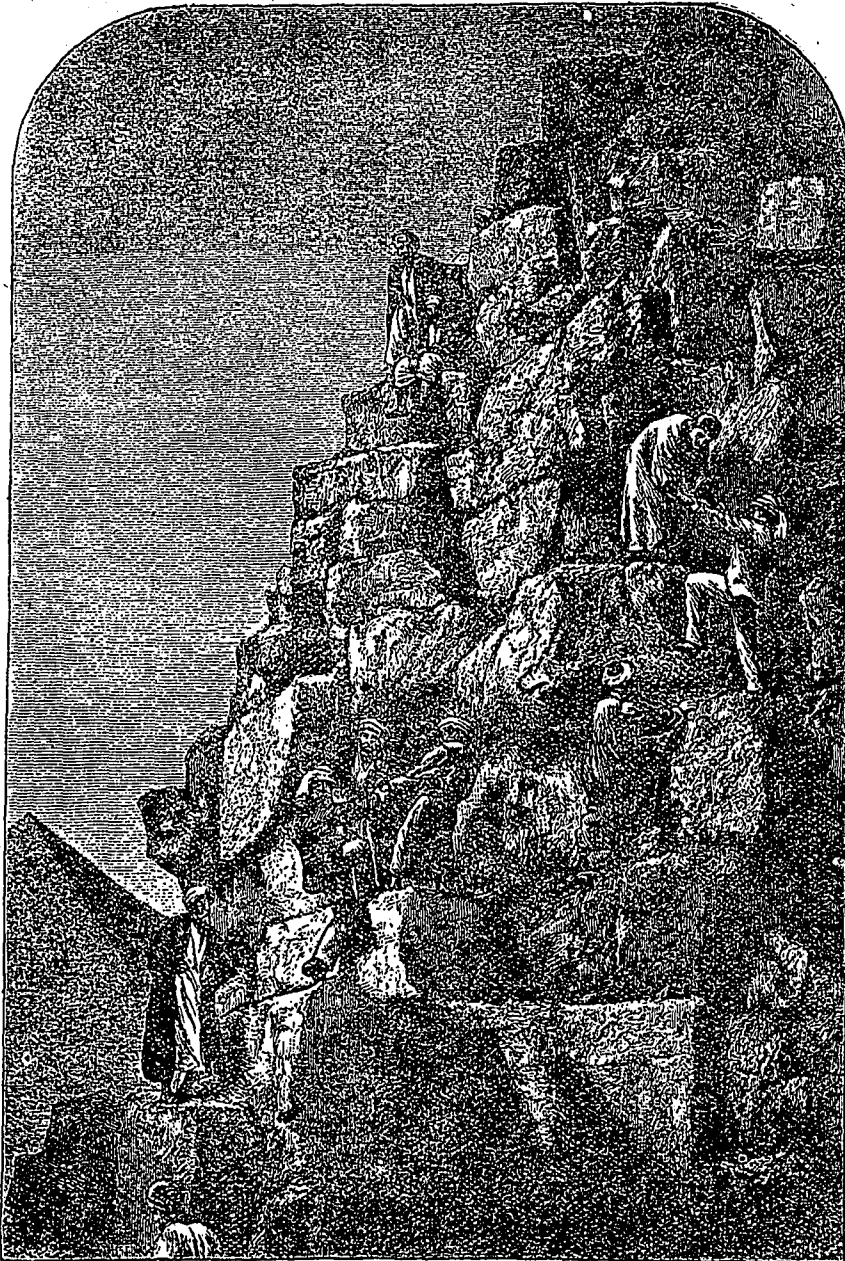
"We can't get out. You pay us large backsheesh and we try."

"Will's answer was entirely effective. First they heard the sharp double click of his revolver. They easily understood what that meant. Then he said,

"Now, fellows, we don't want any of this. I understand just what you are after, but it is of no use. You think you can frighten us into giving you money, as you frightened the Englishman, you had in here the other day. But, as it happens, you are the ones that have most reason to be afraid. Such tricks are not safe play now-a-days. Now light that candle, and be quick about it; it's getting late."

And they were quick. They protested it was all a joke, just for fun; they would do so no more. And during the remainder of the day they were model attendants.

They lingered long about these mighty relics. The shadows from them were stretching far away towards the Nile when at last they called Hassan to bring the donkeys. They mounted and rode away—away from the Pyramids, away from the great, silent Sphinx, away from the clamour of the Arabs. It was their last day in the neighborhood of Cairo.—From *Harry's Trip to the Orient*.



CLIMBING THE UNEVEN STEPS OF THE PYRAMIDS.

would at last be appreciated and accepted. Hassan was to stay behind.

"Now, Harry, here at this corner is the starting-point. Up we go. Don't hurry, and be sure and stop—don't forget this—be sure and stop, no matter how often, whenever you are in the least out of breath or tired."

It was exciting work—the light-robed Arabs, dark, agile, quick as cats, springing along the easiest places, then reaching down with their bare muscular arms to Will and Harry; a strong clasp of hands; a half step and a half spring; higher and higher! Once as they held him Harry missed his footing. There was hardly a hand's breadth any way to rest upon. As he stepped he lost his balance and swung sharply to the right. It would have been a bad fall, but quick as a flash the Arabs braced back against the wall. They kept their grip on his hands. Another pull, and he was safely up on the broader step at their side.

Half way to the summit they stopped for

sunlight; on the other side were the Nile and Cairo and scattered villages and fertile fields. Close beside them, and rather above their level because of its higher foundation and its unbroken apex, towered the second pyramid. A part of its smooth casing is still in place near the summit.

They talked but little to each other; but when it was time to descend Will said:

"Harry, we ought to be better men for what these Pyramids and the desert and the great Nile valley have been saying to us, better men for what God has been saying to us through them. I have been thinking how—great and old as it all is—it is not as lasting and as grand as are the souls of the millions who have lived and died here, not as lasting and as wonderful as our own souls, Harry. The men that built these huge monuments built up at the same time their own character and destiny, and these will last on when the Pyramids themselves are no more."

"How wonderful! And isn't it just so with us too, Cousin Will?"