

THE EGYPTIAN LOTUS.

"The lotus blooms below the barren peak;
 The lotus blows by every winding creek;
 All day the wind breathes low with mellow tone
 Through every hollow cave and alley lone
 Round and round the spicy downs the yellow lotus-
 dust is blown.

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind
 In the hollow lotus-land to live and lie reclined
 On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind,"
 TENNYSON.

Under the name of Lotus (Greek, *Λωτος*) the ancients included various plants, mostly belonging to the natural order Nymphaeaceae, and growing in India and Egypt.

The genus which they seem to have had chiefly in view is the *Nelumbium speciosum*, or *Nelumbo*, which is undoubtedly one of the beauties of the vegetable kingdom, and which flourishes spontaneously in the still lakes and calm waters of the Tropics. This plant, which presents a large corolla, tinted with rose and white, was anciently very common in Egypt, but has almost wholly disappeared; a consequence, it is said, of the frequent inundations of the Nile, which have troubled the tranquility of its watery home, and of too frequent alternations of excessive dryness and humidity. Its rhizoms, or underground stems, furnished the Egyptians with abundant sustenance, easily procured. Dioscorus Siculus, an old writer, seems to allude to this plant under the name of *Aprodis*, and the Romans called it the Egyptian bean (*Faba Aegyptiaca*). Its celebrity reached the ears of the Greeks, who immediately exercised upon it their fertile fancy; and thus arose the myth of the Lotophagi, or lotus eaters, which Homer has enshrined in the *Odyssey*. They were, in sober reality, a peaceful and kindly natured people, inhabiting a district of Cyrenaica, on the north coast of Africa, and living, to a great extent, on the fruit of the lotus, and a wine which they extracted from it. But according to the Greek poet, when Ulysses visited them in the course of his wanderings over sea and land, his companions eating of

"That enchanted stem
 Laden with flower and fruit,"

forgot their native land, their paternal hearths, and sank into a happy state of dreamy listlessness.

"And all at once they sang 'Our island home
 Is far beyond the wave, we will no longer roam.'

Some naturalists suppose this charming fruit to be the African jujube; but the Homeric epithet, "nurse of blossom" seems rather to refer to a shining flower, such as the Nymphaeaceae. If there were truth in the legend, how many languid spirits would gladly partake of a root which could lull them into forgetfulness of their duties and responsibilities!

The Egyptians made the lotus, in allusion

quently depicted as reclining on the bosom of the stream. From his navel issues a colossal lotus plant, and from the lotus plant springs Brahma, the creator of the world. Lakshmi, the Indian Venus or goddess of beauty, is surnamed the lotus-born, and the divinity who find an asylum in the lotus.

The Egyptian lotus, or water-lily, was called by the Egyptians *shuin* or *eschin*, and the Arabs designate it *besnin*, which is just the Egyptian or Coptic name the definite article prefixed. It spreads its broad white flower on the wave of the Nile and its tributary rivulets, while the root is eaten by the people who inhabit the borders of Lake Menzalah. The streams and water-courses near Damietta, are white with this shining blossom, which rises fully two feet above the water. It was the rose of the ancient and mysterious Egypt; it was and is the favourite Egyptian flower, which the women love to weave in their garlands, and bind around their dusky brows. In works of art, such as the prows of boats, and the capitals of columns, it is a constantly recurring ornament.

In Southern India the red lotus is frequently met with. The fable runs, that when Kamadeva (or Cupid) who wounded Siva with his arrow, the blood of the latter dropped upon the lily, and changed its hue for evermore. The flower is larger than that of the white water-lily, and Mrs. Graham pronounces it "the most lovely of all the nymphaeas."

More, in his "Lalla Rookh," has added another to the many poetical associations of this enchanted plant in a charming passage, where he speaks of Cupid, or Love—

"As bards have seen him in their dreams
 Down the blue Ganges laughing glide
 Upon a rosy lotus wreath,
 Catching new lustre from the tide
 That with his image shone beneath."

This is the *Nelumbo*, or *Nelumbium speciosum*. In Cashmere and Persia flourishes the blue lotus or blue water-lily, and the eye of the traveller rests with delight on its starry blossoms



to its aquatic nature and mode, of reproduction, their symbol of fertility and life, and in their religious rites it played an important part. Their god Horus, the divine child, personification of the rising sun, was represented by a lotus springing from the depth of the waters, and the wreath which decorated his breast was composed of the flowers and buds of the same plant.

The same idea is current among the Hindus, who designate the *Nelumbo* under the name of Padma, and take it to be their emblem of life and reproduction. The beauty of the flower has led to their associating it with many of their gods. Vishnu is fre-