

Alexandria And Cleopatra

Founded by the Greeks, This Egyptian City is One of the Most Picturesque Spots in the World, Retaining Its Natural Characteristics Despite the Influx of Many Thousands of Europeans—Trying to Patch Cleopatra's Reputation—By William D. McCrackan, C. S. B.

Alexandria is geographically in Egypt, but neither historically nor archaeologically of the real Egypt. As its name indicates, the city was founded by Alexander the Great, and so was Greek by origin and culture. Cleopatra, who has been strangely enough made to stand for the quintessence of subtle Egyptian evil, was a Greek by race and temperament, though wearing the title of Queen of Egypt and unlabeled historical research tends to rehabilitate her as a woman by no means detestable, a good mother and a helpful wife.

The fertile strip between two deserts which is flooded by the Nile and which is called Egypt has little resemblance to the sea coast around Alexandria. Even from a climatic point of view there are pronounced differences. It may be said that the traveller who merely touches at Alexandria does not know Egypt at all, whatever his state of emotion may have been to find such a well-equipped city on the sea sands. Mohammed Ali cut a canal to the Nile, thus providing for the Alexandrians at the same time transportation and drinking water for it may as well be known by all travellers that the only water drunk in Egypt comes from the chocolate-colored Nile, in which a great population seems to live and move and bathe. What alchemy of filtration changes that dark flood into the crystal water which comes upon the

hotel table in bright shining carriages is known only to the government experts at the water works.

The culture of Alexandria was never of the desert, nor of the Pyramid, the Sphinx or the Obelisk, but it was Greek under the strong arm of Roman law, as elsewhere in the Levant. The destruction of the famous library at Alexandria by the ruthless Saracens wiped away whole periods of classic literature, some of it probably unworthy of perpetuation, but there were doubtless later editions of Christian writings which would be priceless. Many Jews in those days flocked to Alexandria, and among them were numbers who had embraced Christianity and treasured Jesus' sayings.

Cleopatra belonged to the period just before Jesus' birth, the period of Julius Caesar, Pompey and Augustus Caesar. It was the last of those who issued the decree of taxation which sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, and it was also he who some years before, after his victory over Mark Anthony, visited Cleopatra in Alexandria without being able to allay her suspicion that he meant to march her in his triumphal procession through Rome. The outcome was the spectacular suicide of Cleopatra. There seems no reason to doubt the popular story that she died by putting an asp to her breast, which had been introduced into her place of refuge in a basket of

fruit. Today Alexandria is a polyglot place. To the descendants of the original Greeks has been added a multitude of Arabs, about a quarter of a million Italians, a goodly company of well-to-do French, and now the ruling English. As of old many Jews live in Alexandria, whose rich men are noted for the works of beneficence. But the great war brought out many good works from noted Alexandrians. One of the principal benefactors of the city, an Englishman who has made his money there and is reputed to have given away quite one-half of his fortune, turned two of his fine houses into convalescent homes.

As elsewhere in Egypt, the clinking of two brass disks together announces the vendor of cool drinks, who wanders in all hot places in search of customers. But there are less agreeable frequenters of the streets. The Arabs, who have always been aggressive beggars, have become worse since the war. Nothing satisfies them, and an expression of thanks does not cross their lips. The writer had an amusing experience of the prevalent thieving propensities. There was a long wait at the custom house on the way from the docks to the hotel in Alexandria, during which the driver of the vehicle seemed to be taking an unusual interest in the handbags, which had been placed on the box beside him. One member of the party observed that he was fumbling with the fastenings; but it was not discovered until after the arrival at the hotel that he had extracted a folding leather case.

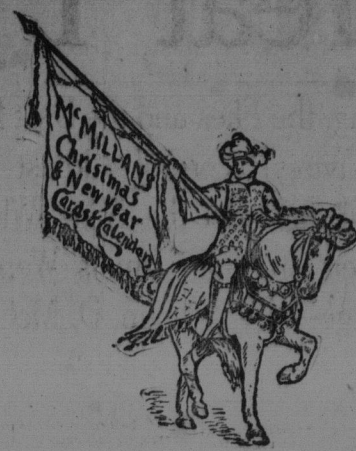
The satisfaction the writer derived from the incident was derived from the thought of the thief's disappointment when he should discover that what looked like a substantial wallet really contained nothing but a pair of very old and much worn bedroom slippers. The waterfront of Alexandria, with its salt breezes to temper the summer heat, is a joy. The official British residences and seat of government is in Cairo, but those English officials who can do so go to Alexandria for the winters and the bathing, or at any rate send their families there if unable to go themselves.

Those who suppose that the luxuries of modern life cannot be procured in Egypt should go shopping in Alexandria, or Cairo for that matter. Egypt has suffered more indirectly than directly from the war. The best French dress goods for women are on sale, and the best English suits for men. Especially in Alexandria a good place in which to buy those many varieties of cotton twills, alpaca and undyed silks which are so well suited to hot climates. It seemed to me that the French pastry I tasted in Alexandria was better than what I could procure a few weeks ago in France; and the everywhere present Thomas Cook & Son and the Kodak Co. supply every imaginable need under their respective heads.

This year, as during the previous four, there are no tourists. The country feels this, of course, but on the other hand it has not been ravaged by contending armies—and for that is grateful. Nowhere can the British genius for governing without any unnecessary display be so clearly seen as in Egypt. When, at the outbreak of the war, the British Government was forced to declare a protectorate over Egypt, very little was changed. The English are still acting in an advisory capacity, without apparently taking advantage of their position to make Egypt British. As many positions of trust as it is safe to assign to officials of the governing caste of Turkish ancestry or to the native Egyptians are thus distributed; but there are few fundamental differences which British good will constantly encounters. It is difficult to make the officials of Turkish ancestry understand that a public officer must be impartial. The oriental conception of rulership involves favoring one's friends and avenging oneself upon one's enemies. With reference to the native Egyptians, education is still so rudimentary among them that few are fitted for public office. Probably 2-ALEXANDRIA AND CLEO—... eighty or ninety per cent. of native Egyptians are illiterate.

On the wide plains inland from Alexandria is a great profusion of crops, including wide stretches of our American corn, that make the country green instead of sandy as one's imagination previously pictured it. Just now (at the beginning of September) the cotton fields are in bloom, displaying countless acres of the yellow flower. There are date palms, fig trees, and even bananas; and farther south the sugar cane grows successfully. But cotton is the most valuable crop that Egypt produces or Alexandria exports, being of that long-stapled variety that is absolutely necessary for the manufacture of certain high-class cotton goods—a kind that is difficult to raise outside of Egypt, although Arizona, I am told, has had more than a little success with it.

During the middle of the day Alexandria remains indoors, and even the banks are closed; but about four o'clock there is a great stir in the streets. Parties in cabs and crowds in the tramcars go to the sea-front or sit in the side-walk cafes. The Casino at San Stefano becomes full of English (Continued on following page)



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