

Sketches in the Orient.

When I appeared on the verandah of the hotel in the morning at Cairo, my ears were saluted with cries in pigeon-English, such as, "strong donkey, master," "good donkey, master," "she no kick," "Billy Barlow good because she have plenty oi feed," "Yankee Doodle firstest best," which meant that a visit to the Pyramids was one of the traveler's first duties. I held parley with the groom of Billy Barlow, who had the preternatural sharpness of a New York newsboy, and after the usual wrangle came to terms. From a wink which the guardian of Billy Barlow gave to one of his comrades, I discovered that he was well satisfied with his contract, and that he regarded me as one who had been somewhat "done."

I mounted the much extolled animal, and in company with several others started in a steeple-chase through the streets and out of the city, each pursued by a lad crying at intervals as he urged the fleeing donkey, "hooah, hooah," English fashion!

The genial sunny air, the Oriental surroundings, the novelty of the mount, quickness of movement, shouts of the gamins, and *elan* of the whole proceeding, produced what is often sought in vain—a new emotion. The ludicrous was dominant in the situation, and some of my companions laughed so heartily as to be able with difficulty to keep their saddles.

Some animals are always comic-looking, such as monkeys and donkeys; and when the latter is mounted he imparts to a certain extent, his character to his cavalier. There was a companion with us who was a central figure, and one of the moving causes of the merriment—a staid doctor of divinity with spectacles on nose and umbrella in hand. A gulf separated the solemn divine of the pulpit from him who fled as from the wrath to come, on a galloping ass, out of the ancient city of Cairo—which did not prevent him from sharing in the general mirth.

The donkey belongs to Egypt as much as the camel and the palm-tree, and donkey-riding enters as largely into the life as smoking and coffee drinking. He is a small bundle of dry, tough sinews, over a frame of hard bones, the tegument of a nut. He is little fed and much clubbed, since the kindness of the Arab toward animals exists only in tradition. One of the most common abuses to which the donkey is subjected, is throwing heavy burdens over him attached to sharp cords, which cut into the flesh until it is raw. In spite of ill-usage, he is patient, reasonably willing to work, and lives to great age—the dead donkey being almost apocryphal: and Mohammed is not entitled to the reputation for justice which his followers accord to him, if he has not provided this little animal with comfortable quarters in Paradise, where the thistle and keff abound for evermore, as some compensation for the ills of his present life.

In our donkey ride to the pyramids, we dismounted at Ghizen to cross the Nile. This was the first heat of the race. Here there was an excited discussion between our guides and the boatman as to the price for carrying us over.

An old Nile traveller suggested my sitting down under a tree for a while with him, when I replied that the boat was on the point of starting and we would not have the time. With a quiet smile he returned that we would not go for half an hour. His answer proved to be correct, and showed a knowledge of Egyptian nature. The wrangle as to terms continued for over half an hour, during which we chafed