

Chapter 13

Egypt - General Memories

Egypt was dirty and it stank but it had a magic of its own. After all, its history went back thousands of years and the remains were there to be seen. There was no better way to gain an insight into their history than to visit the Cairo Museum where intact remains dating back seven thousand years were on view.

When I was there, the Tomb of Tutankhamen had not long been open and I saw these wonderful things, his throne etc. looking as new as the day they were made.

There were a whole variety of things on show which presented a very good picture of life hundreds of years ago. It also showed me that the Egyptians then had a pride which had seemed to have been lost. One amusing incident occurred while we were in the museum. I wandered into a room full of little statues

and the males all had large erect penises. The Egyptians were, to say the least, a realistic race, and very virile too, going by the statues! However, I was hurriedly dragged out of there by my Mother.



Second Pyramid - Kephren

The Zoological Gardens was another favourite place for us. We used to have a pleasant tea in a café on a small island in a lake reached by a bridge. I can't remember the animals, but the setting was lovely. We, of course, visited the Pyramids at Giza. The Sphinx in those days had its feet covered in sand but was later excavated. The large pyramid, Cheops, was made up of huge stones 9' x 9' x 9' and the base of the whole structure was correct to within 1' on any side. We could have ridden on camels at Giza but never did as they seemed dirty, bad-tempered animals. Dad used to like to talk to the desert Arabs there but we stood rather aloof. On looking back, I am sure that he had the right idea.

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Another good trip was to the Barrage upstream on the Nile. We went there on a river steamer as a party. There was a parkland where we used to play cricket and have picnics. On the way, the fellaheen could be seen working their fields, the blindfolded oxen trudging wearily round and round pumping water. The boat was slow and the children were a bit bored with the actual journey but it was fun once we were there. One time we came back with me flat on my back, my nose covered in ice bags. I had got an awful nose bleed.

I went one day to the Red Hills which was a desert area containing different coloured sands which the natives would bottle in different layers. They looked quite pretty.

Every year there were student riots in Cairo and so we never went to the cinema there. It was funny really as the students used to go to the cinema and then stand up in rows yelling "Down with the English". Rows of Scotsmen would then stand up and proceed to fight the students on behalf of the English. The Police seemed a well-ordered lot and very smart, many being Ex British Army.

There was an Army Club in Cairo and occasionally we would spend an evening there drinking, chatting and reading two weeks old English newspapers. I wonder now how much damage has been done to the world as a result of instantaneous news on radio and television? Another well-known place we visited for afternoon tea was "Groppis", known all over the world for its cream cakes. The taxis in Cairo were a menace and were driven like racing cars. Most of them were Fiats, but I don't know why. A lot of begging went on in the streets. Little kids mutilated and asking for baksheesh. The only trouble was that when you gave to one an immediate crowd gathered all with outstretched hands. It became quite difficult, blindness, crippled arms and legs and poverty was rife. Not a pleasant sight. Also, in Cairo was a brass market called the Mouske. There you were expected to bargain for brassware but although we looked around, we never bought. The brassware that we did buy was purchased from a hawker who came round the camp. You were still expected to bargain. Another hawker who came round was a Swiss wearing dark glasses; he sold cottons and fabrics etc.

I have previously mentioned the sights and smells of Egypt, but there were also the sounds. One remembered is the row that went up in the evening during Ramadan when the natives could break their fast. Second was the sound of "The Last Post" floating across the still night, the sky black but bright with stars. The sound I most disliked was the Fire Siren. There were several fires while we were there and in that dry climate it was frightening. Talking of dryness, it only rained three times in the three years we were there. One other disturbing sound was of the poor locked up in the Egyptian Lunatic Asylum which was just outside of the camp bounds. The Egyptian people seemed to be divided into two distinct groups, rich and poor. The Egyptians were often accused of being dishonest and perhaps they were but who could blame them? They were a very excitable race and when a funeral passed through the streets of Cairo one was well advised to get out of the way as all the bystanders joined in. There was a racecourse near Cairo and Dad, on occasions, acted as a gatekeeper taking the money. We all went with him once. I remember we backed only one horse on the Tote and it won by a mile. It was a grey horse and the jockey's name was Garcia. A strange thing to remember!