

BOAT LIFE

IN EGYPT AND NUBIA.

BY

WILLIAM C. PRIME,

AUTHOR OF "TENT LIFE IN THE HOLY LAND," "THE OLD HOUSE BY
THE RIVER," "LATER YEARS," ETC.



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suaded to occupy arable land and raise camels for his uses, and whom Said Pasha has converted into enemies by attempting to tax. There was a great rascal, in the shape of an owner of a boat, who was endeavoring to extract a sum of money out of a poor reis by a summary process, not unlike some attempts that I have seen in other countries, in which attempt there were some ten or twelve villagers deeply interested, while two ghawazee—dancing girls—dressed in the voluptuous, half-naked style of their profession, swindled the various parties out of successive cups of coffee, or the money to buy them, by the same arts that women of their character practice all the world over.

The dispute about the boat, between the owner and the reis, grew furious. All shouted at once, and now I learned that the sheik of the reises was present endeavoring to settle the difficulty.

This is a feature of Egyptian government. Every trade or business has its sheik. In Cairo you will hear constantly of the sheik of the donkey-owners, and, on any dispute arising among your boys as to the division of the day's pay, you had nothing to do but to throw down your money, and let them go to their sheik and settle it.

Achmet, the boat owner, had contracted with Reis Barikat to let him his boat for a year at a fixed rate per month, and he had had it a year and a half, and paid regularly. Just at this time freights were very high, and the boat was loaded with grain, and ready to go down the river, when the rascally Achmet demanded the boat, on the ground that his contract was for a year and no longer, and although it ran on six months longer, that was no reason why it should six months more.

The dispute waxed furious, and came at last to the true western style.

“You lie.”

“You lie yourself.”

And then they went at each other. Loud shouts arose on all sides, and the ghawazee danced in uproarious fun at the idea of a fight, and ran up to me with the most decided indications of their intent to embrace me as they had embraced every body else.

I was sitting on a bench of mud a little elevated from the mud floor of the coffee-shop. I drew my feet up under me, and felt for the handle of a friend in my shawl-belt as the roaring, screaming mass came over toward me, and just then Abd-el-Atti made his appearance with koorbash in hand. A koorbash is Arabic for cow-hide, the cow being a rhinoceros. It is the most cruel whip known to fame. Heavy as lead, and flexible as India rubber, usually about forty inches long and tapering gradually from an inch in diameter to a point, it administers a blow which leaves its mark for time.

I had not been on the Nile a week before I learned that the koorbash was the only weapon of defense necessary to carry, and we soon gave up knives and pistols and took to the whip, of which all the people had a salutary horror.

Abd-el-Atti made the crowd fly as he swung his weapon among them, and silence ensued with astonishing suddenness.

“How dare you make such a row in the presence of Braheem Effendi?”

“Who is Braheem Effendi?” asked the reis of the boatmen, for up to this moment he had not observed that the stranger in the coffee-shop was a Howajji. This was owing not to my oriental appearance so much as to the extremely shabby costume that I happened to have on that morning.

“Yonder he is.”

The reis advanced immediately to pay his respects

In the twilight I strolled through the bazaars at Ghe-neh, crowded with Ababdee Arabs, carrying huge heads of matted hair, some curled in masses of pipe-stem curls, and some hideously filthy. At the corners were many dark-eyed Ghawazee, with white complexions and lithe forms carefully exposed to view. One, a fair-faced girl with flashing black eyes, who hung close to me as I bought some perfume at a drug shop, and held out her tattooed hand to be touched with the fragrant oil, had been of rare beauty, but was now sadly faded. There was a peculiarity about her face that attracted my attention. It was so very American. In home-costume I should have taken her for a heart-broken New England girl. Her complexion was whiter than the ordinary complexion of a New York lady's face, even than a blonde, and I started when I first saw her, and wondered what girl could have been left by a traveler's boat to shame and misery in this far city.

Next day, I walked from the river to the temple at Dendera, shooting over the plain. Pigeons were plenty, and I killed a fox. The temple is of modern times. We call things old, not from actual age, but in comparison. Old for a man is young for a tree, but old for a tree is young for a temple. This temple that was built in the days of Cleopatra, and has a portrait of her on its walls, is of little interest in comparison with those that were built in the days of Jacob or Moses. It is in very perfect preservation, and we wandered from room to room for hours. The great zodiac on the ceiling of the corridor remains there still, but a smaller one from one of the smaller rooms has been removed to Paris. I shall not weary my reader, who is already sufficiently be-templed, with any sketch of the group at Dendera. The capitals of the columns of the great corridor, which are in fact four-faced heads of goddesses, have been often described and en-

graved, as also the grotesque figures on the smaller temple. We should have remained here all day, but for an engagement to review Abd-el-Kader's troops at Gheneh, and we returned to the river, crossed, and went up to the palace.

The troops were altogether the best disciplined body of men that I saw in the East, and Abd-el-Kader prided himself much on them. They went through the evolutions with precision, uttering at each order or motion a guttural *hugh*, like a North American Indian's expression of surprise, which enabled them to keep perfect time.

We had coffee and pipes again in the cool reception room, and Miriam honored his magnificent amber and diamond mouth-piece with the touch of her lips. He presented her with a bowl, made from the horn of a rhinoceros, a rare and costly present, and one most highly prized among the Orientals. This bowl (a rhinoceros furnishes but one as large as this) it is said has a power of detecting poison, so that none can be administered or taken in it. It will fly to pieces on the touch of poison, if its fabled virtue is true.

When we returned to the boat, he had sent down a quantity of presents in the usual style, among which the most curious were a large variety of fowls, known only at Dendera.

