

Chapter 30: Eastern Travel, Egypt (1846-1847)

In her autobiography, Martineau recorded that she and her travelling companions met in London in October after she had secured her outfit and had run down into Norfolk "to see old Norwich again." In addition to calling on family and friends, Martineau had ordered, shopped, sewn and packed various items of dress, footwear and daily use items listed in her appendix to *Eastern Life*. Among these were a "Levinge's bag" for sleeping (recommended by Sir John Gardner Wilkinson in *Modern Egypt and Thebes*), "gimlets, stuck into a cork" to serve for bolts, pins or pegs[,] . . . [t]wo or three squares of Mackintosh cloth," washable men's and women's clothing like "woodstock gloves," ladies' dresses of brown Holland, linen or cotton underclothes, "little cotton caps" for the head - and round straw ladies' hats "such as may be had at Cairo for 4s. or 5s." plus "a large stock of thick-soled shoes and boots." A "discontinuance of flannel clothing" was not recommended for Egypt, and fans, and "goggles of black woven wire" were indispensable—plus no lady who valued peace of mind and freedom on the journey would take a maid. "As to diet," the safest was to eat "as one does at home" and to drink ale and porter, tea and coffee - the chibouque usually proving "eminently good for health."¹

Although Atkinson had evidently agreed to join the party, he travelled with them only to Boulogne. "We traversed France to Marseilles," Martineau recorded briefly in her autobiography, "resting for two days at Paris, where, strange to say, I had never been before." At Marseilles, they boarded a mail packet with an inept Capt. Glasscock who flirted with a widow and wasted "precious autumn days" en route to Malta owing to his failure to buy enough coal and to their "northerly route." Once over her seasickness, Martineau stayed on deck enduring cockroaches and disgusting meals. At last, a mail steamer from Valetta looking for them appeared, and the captain's lack of a speaking trumpet was unexpectedly remedied by the other ship's officers' spying Martineau's "trumpet." At Malta, where Martineau dispatched a "journal-letter" to her family she found the captain taking a keen interest in her welfare. Later she learned that rivalry between English and French companies vying for the right to build a railway in Egypt explained the captain's sudden attention, a merchant friend of his in Alexandria having already imported the rails. Plainly, he wanted Martineau to write a book like Isabella Romer's advocating an *English* railway scheme. In the end, the merchant's brother labeled Martineau's even-handed treatment of the plan (in *Eastern Life*) "damned humbug."²

In accepting the Yates' offer, Martineau must have glimpsed the thrill of more authentically portraying Biblical figures from first-hand experience of their surroundings, but she had "little idea . . . how the convictions and the action of the remnant of my life would be shaped and determined by what I saw and thought during those months." As they travelled, Martineau's hosts tactfully left her "perfectly free," while deafness allowed her to study and contemplate her experiences. "I obtained clearness as to the historical nature and moral value of all theology whatever," she boasted, "and attained that view of it which has been set forth in some of my subsequent works" (a subtle warning of the storm caused by her follow-up to *Eastern Life: Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*).³

Ewart duly joined the party at Malta, accompanied by his large dog, Pierre. In the ship *Ariel* they proceeded to North Africa, and on a somewhat lurid November evening they caught

a glimpse of Tunis and an offshore island. On 20 November, they spotted the Libyan headland with a Moorish tower, and by three in the afternoon were anchored in the harbor of Alexandria. Martineau gazed with intense interest at the distinctive sights - the windmills, Pompey's Pillar and "the Pasha's palace and hareem, with their gardens and rows of palms coming down to the margin of the sea." Even more striking was the "turbaned and gesticulating" pilot guiding them to shore - Martineau's first moment of attraction to romantic-looking Arab men.

Before the anchor was down, they were surrounded by a crowd of boats "containing a few European gentlemen and a multitude of screaming Arabs" who reminded Martineau of "a frog concert in a Carolina swamp." Fortunately, an English merchant was on hand to "put our luggage into one boat and ourselves into another." Various mishaps followed: as they approached their hotel on foot through narrow streets a horse ran away and scattered some of their goods. Next morning, looking out her window, Martineau first noted the shabby local houses. Soon "a string of camels passed through the Square, pacing noiselessly along" and arousing her intense dislike, and then a procession of harem ladies riding on asses. After coffee, the party sallied out for a walk before breakfast. Surprisingly, in spite of dirt and prevalent disease, Martineau thought people appeared "sleek, well-fed and cheerful."⁴

During their four days' sightseeing in Alexandria, Martineau saw and *heard* her first "sakia" (the ubiquitous oxen-driven waterwheels), admired the gardens of oleanders, figs, dates, oranges and cabbages, and visited both the Pasha's palace and the naval arsenal. On "Mont Cretin . . . the best point for a survey of the whole district," Yates set up a telescope and with map and compass the party tried to identify ancient and classical sites. Martineau imagined the scene at the "times of the Ptolemies" with the picturesque "clustered houses . . . white and clear against the morning sky." To the party's amusement, a group of Arab workers "ceased their work to peep at us from behind the ridges."

Welcomed by various European residents, Martineau's party learned of mutual jealousies among them. With eleven hours of daylight, she found she could read small print for half an hour after sunset. During ten weeks on the Nile, she witnessed gorgeous sunsets followed by an afterglow when "the hills are again purple or golden, - the sands orange, - the palms verdant, - the moonlight on the water, a pale green ripple on a lilac surface."⁵

Dating the progress of their journey, Martineau recorded in *Eastern Life* that on "the 25th of November, we left Alexandria, rising by candle-light at six, and seeing the glorious morning break by the time we were dressed." Ewart had engaged a dragoman, Alee Mustafa, and the party took an omnibus to the Mahmoudieh Canal (built by the Pasha at painful cost to his subjects) for the day's boat ride to the junction of the Nile. At Atfeh, they boarded a steamer for Cairo - Martineau closely observing both their fellow passengers and the Arab boatmen. The steamer was soon grounded, however, and allowed them hardly any sleep. Then at four in the afternoon, "Mr. E. came . . . with a mysterious countenance, and asked me if I should like to be the first to see the Pyramids." Soon "mounted on boxes and coops," she saw them "emerging from behind a sandhill." Seemingly small, they nevertheless filled her with surprise and awe, as if she had "never before looked upon any thing so new as those clear and vivid masses." At sunset, an "infinity of birds" appeared, showing the "wildness of the country and the foreign character of the scenery." After landing, they passed under an avenue of acacias to Cairo's Hotel d'Orient. Next morning looking out into the wide Ezbekiya square,

Martineau was again thrilled: "over the tree tops rose the Pyramids, seemingly only a stone's throw off."

Yates and Ewart next capably hired a dahabieh for the Nile journey, and to examine the boat they all rode to "Boolák" mounted on donkeys. Names, modes of transport, people and every detail of the scene enchanted Martineau. The countenance of "the captain of the crew," the Rais, struck her as fine "notwithstanding a slight squint." Kind and courteous in manner, he was cautious about endangering the boat. At times during the journey, she noted, he took an oar or worked the ropes with the crew, or for many hours "sat on the gunwale singing to the rowers some mournful song, to which they replied in a chorus yet more mournful." Before sailing, they laid in supplies: "[m]attresses and spices, wine and crockery, macaroni, camp-stools, biscuits, candles, a table, fruit, sponges, saucepans, soap, cordage, tea and sugar." Bookshelves were installed in the main cabin and the cupboards stocked with "medicines, pickles, tools, paper and string, &c." A young Scotsman, staying at their hotel with a sister and two friends, was to compete with them on the journey.

Martineau recorded that on 1 December "a curious cavalcade" set off in the moonlight with donkey boys - "one, carried my desk, another, the arrow-root, and a third, the chocolate." Their crew of fourteen included five Nubians plus "Alee and his assistant, Hasan; and the cook, - a grotesque and amusing personage." On their first morning, the two Englishwomen hemmed a table cover and curtain for the cabin, Martineau watching a blind Arab led to the water by his donkey. In mid-afternoon, Alee reported "the last crate of fowls was on board; the signal was given, and away we went."⁶

As they voyaged up the Nile, Martineau was struck by the exotic scenery, the variety and numbers of birds and the behavior and singing of the crew. Nearing Asyoot on 7 December, where the crew was to bake their bread for the remainder of the voyage up, they first saw the interior of the country:

In the morning our canvas was down, along the landward side of our boats; so that the people on shore could not pry. It was pleasant, however, to play the spy upon them . . . a company of men washing clothes in the river under a picturesque old wall [and] boat-builders diligently at work on shore.

Martineau was impressed by the engineering of a vast causeway and irrigation system set off by flowering mimosas on the banks "as large . . . as oaks of fifty years growth in England." In Asyoot, a scribe addressed letters in Arabic for them to be sent through the consul at Cairo. Riding out to ancient rock-cut tombs, they passed a funeral procession of howling women. Egyptian *colors* attracted Martineau - the brilliant green of the countryside reminded her of the Illinois prairie. To the east lay "the varied line of the Arabian hills, of a soft lilac tint," and she could hear *sounds*.

In *Eastern Life*, Martineau was to record historical and legendary connections of the Egyptians to the Greeks, Persians, Romans and Old Testament figures. Beyond Cairo, she noted "the angularity of almost all forms" and wished for a "great winnowing fan [to] blow away the sand which buries the monuments." Yet the sand would preserve them, she concluded, until scholars aided by science, "chemical and mechanical," were ready to interpret them.

On 11 December, Martineau was "on deck before sunrise." A man was sent for milk after their landing, and she walked along the bank looking at goats among the rocks and at sheep. That day they saw their first doum palm and their first crocodile. Two days later they

stopped at a village where the Ottoman governor of Egypt, Selim Pasha, happened to be collecting his taxes. He appeared "old, short, and very business-like" sitting under a palm receiving papers, surrounded by

turbaned and gazing groups under the tamarisks, the white-robed soldiers before the gate of the barracks; the stretch of town-walls beside us, and the minarets of Eckmim [Akhmîm] rising out of the palm-groves on the opposite shore.

At their next stop, Girgeh, they bought bread, fowls at "1 3/4d.," a sheep (at "6s.") and forty two eggs for "2 1/4d." Two of their "sapien crew" having quarreled over a piece of bread, the Rais "administered the bastinado" but the men seemed quickly to forget it. By "the morning of the 19th," they were nearing the temple of Dendara. Crocodiles plunged into the river as they passed, and Martineau soon caught a glimpse of the "massive portico." To their surprise, "an elderly man, with a white beard, hideous teeth, and coarse face" boarded their boat. Was it Selim Pasha and an attendant come to call? "Up I jumped, with my lap full of work," Martineau later laughed, but it proved to be only "the son and grandson of the English consul at Kenneh." That "discreet old Arab" reportedly tricked foreigners by inviting them to dine, and when they were on their way to the town, stepping back to the boat and laying hands on all the provisions he could find, "from eggs to Maraschino."⁷

As they walked on shore through fields of tobacco and millet on 20 December gathering "the beautiful yellow blossom of the cotton shrub," they saw two boats "bearing British and American flags" and *pityed* Cairo acquaintances who had to turn back after Thebes. Next day from the hour of breakfast, they looked intently towards the Libyan hills containing the "Tombs of the Kings: and before noon, we had seen what we can never forget." With the naked eye "and perfectly with the glass," they saw the "long rows of square apertures," the Rameséum, and "my heart stood still at the sight, - the Pair," Martineau exulted.

A stop at Thebes had not been planned for their journey upriver, but "the Rais wanted to have his head shaved, and Alee to buy a sheep and some bread." At El-Uksur (Luxor), they "ran up to the ruins," and Martineau declared that "no conception can be formed of these places:" covered by sculptures, "so old, so spirited, and so multitudinous," they seemed "Homer, alive, before one's eyes." As they continued southward, a strong wind caused a "stay on the foremast" to give way, upsetting the "calm and pathetic-looking Rais." The stay being repaired, they raced Scottish and American parties on the river. Though intending to see Adfoo on the return journey, they took advantage of "no wind . . . to run up to the temple." There Martineau was "taken by surprise with the *beauty . . . of everything*" including "the sweet girlish countenances of Isis and Athor" [sic] and was awed by "the amount of labour invested in the inscriptions."⁸

In *Eastern Life*, Martineau recorded that friends at home had promised to drink their health on Christmas day when *they* should be at the first cataract. On a morning like an English day in July, the Yates party planned to return the toast. "When we came within two miles, we left our letter-writing," she recorded, and even the crew became merry in the prospect of rest. One dressed himself "very fine, swathing himself with

turbans, and began to dance, to the music and clapping of the rest." Next, they put on shore a former Rais who had begged a passage from Cairo and was returning home after twenty-five years. With "an air of entire tranquility," he thrust his muddy feet into new "bright red slippers" and disappeared among the palms. "Aswán was now peeping over the palms on the eastern shore," opposite the island of Elephantine. "We moored to the shore below . . . just at two o'clock; and thus we kept our appointment to dine at the First Cataract on Christmas-day."

Their dinner featured turkey and plum pudding, "the last-mentioned novelty" succeeding so well they sent a huge piece to the Rais, "who ate it all in a trice, and gave it his emphatic approbation."⁹

At Aswán in a "mob-market," Martineau's ear trumpet was "handled and examined," the throng concluding it was a pipe, "with an enormous bowl!" She thought the people good looking but wondered at their "incessantly begging of strangers." At two "slave-bazaars," the children for sale appeared jarringly "intelligent and cheerful-looking." Next morning, Martineau and Anne Yates, riding under their brown holland umbrellas, set off on asses for "Mahatta, - the village at the head of the Cataract." In the desert, Martineau found that an "oppression of the sense of sight disturbs the brain, so that the will of the unhappy wanderer cannot keep his nerves in order." Dragonflies "glittering in the sunshine of the Desert, where there appears to be nothing for them to alight on," astonished her. The wildness of Mahatta appeared "fantastic, - impish . . . the wildness of Prospero's island." Among the ruins, the obelisk piqued their curiosity.

Elephantine disappointed her, however, and the boat lagged in getting to Philae. Then a swimmer "with a log under his breast" came up to the boat, "bringing a fish half as big as himself," which they promptly bought for "7 1/2d."

Returning briefly downriver, they found their kandjia - a smaller boat for ascending the cataract two days hence - "cleaned, sunk [to drown the rats], raised, and dried." That evening, Martineau and Anne walked on the shore "without bonnet or shawl . . . by moonlight on the 27th of December" -- a thing they were unlikely to do again! Next morning, they two rose early and ironed till dinnertime, "that we might carry our sheets and towels in the best condition to the kandjia." (Puzzled Arab crews never understood the "weekly ceremony of the flat-iron," one man concluding it was "the English way of killing lice").¹⁰

Martineau was to devote two chapters of *Eastern Life* to the ascent of the first two cataracts. Admiring the Nubians, Martineau wished such perfect physical specimens could be sent to Europe as missionaries, for their land rights under the Ottomans worried her. Along with a partly different crew, the kandjia had been hired "for twenty-five days, for the sum of 13/. 10s." Their buffoon cook was now "in his glory, - among stranger comrades who would listen to his long stories." On 31 December, they passed the tents and soldiers of a M. Arnault who was making a "survey and search for water . . . in preparation for his road to the Red Sea." Still delaying their visits to the temples, the group heard of a party of gentlemen coming from Aboo Simbil who would carry letters for them. "The great temple of Aboo-Simbil, - the chief object of our Nubian voyage [was] so near us!" Martineau recorded, but before they could reach it a "Nile gale" arose, and they "struck on a sand-bank with a great shock." Shivering crew members jumped over the side to heave them off, while the boat began slowly to go over. "Alee flew about giving orders amidst the rush of the wind; and the cook worked at the poling

with all his strength." Suddenly, the Rais "threw off his clothes in a single instant and sprang up the mast like a cat" to take in the difficult lateen sail and save them.

After the near tragedy, they rode next day "through the western desert to the rock of Abooseer, - the furthest point of our African travel." In the morning, Yates and Ewart visited "a school of six scholars" in the village, while Martineau noticed the "handsome children, and a charming group of women under a large sycamore." Climbing to a summit, she looked down "a sheer descent . . . of two hundred feet." Gushing waters, flocks of pigeons, "the desert, river, and black basaltic rocks" rendered the scene "wild beyond description." Like other past travellers including Belzoni, the party carved their names on the rock "with a nail and hammer."

That day at dinner, one of their dishes was "an excellent omelette" made of part of an ostrich egg "bought for six piastres (1s. 2d.)." On 7 January, the party at last agreed to "begin our course of study of the Monuments."¹¹

"I went up to the smaller temple early in the morning," Martineau recorded casually in *Eastern Life*, yet "impatient to get to the Colossi" at Aboo Simbil, "after breakfast, I set forth alone." Next day, she saw grottos with paintings inside that only Ewart could reach. Stops at the villages began to be interspersed with visits to temples. In describing Philae, Martineau cited the history of Osiris from Plutarch to Wilkinson. After a week, they "set off down the river, - with our heads full of Thebes."¹²

Boats flying European flags began to pass, while myriads of birds reappeared. At Isna they toured the Pasha's palace and cotton factory. Prisoners in the guardhouse wore chains that "glittered in the sun," and cried out "'baksheesh' as vigorously as any idler in the place." At Thebes, they were invited into the home of an elderly Signor Castellare, who offered antiquities to visitors (illegally) at high prices. In the evenings Martineau often went for "a canter over the plain" on a donkey secured for her by Alee. At one tomb, attendants unrolled two mummies for them to inspect, and while they fingered "the curly hair" of one, "the dragoman coolly wrenched off the head." On 26 January at Karnak, they were shown a stuffed crocodile for sale, "a hideous creature; but I was glad to have an opportunity for a safe study of it," Martineau concluded. "Then we went down to our old kandjia of the cataracts, which had just arrived with a cargo of slaves for Ibraheem Pasha's hareem." Blandly mixing impressions of the ancient and the modern, Martineau commented that "[t]he girls looked as earnest and content as they always do while making cakes . . . but the officer who had charge of them and the boys carried a little whip."¹³

At Karnak, Martineau spotted "sculptured and painted blocks" built into the propyla that were "remnants of a still earlier time," and she marveled that the propyla themselves were "standing before Moses was born." On 31 January off "Gebel el Elredeh," she wrote to Milnes lauding the Egyptian gods for their tranquil power - and the people's ability to control the powers of nature in comparison to English "learners." Wandering in temple ruins had roused her to study Lepsius versus Champollion on the decipherment of hieroglyphics. While longing for a preventive to the depredation, she did not tire of the temples. Among the English residents at Cairo they had met was the Consul General Charles Murray, who was ill and whom she mesmerized. Chatting on to Milnes, she reported the amusing ironing of their linens on the boat.

After visiting thirty tombs at Benee Hasan, Martineau dismissed the connection to Old Testament figures of those painted on the walls. "And what shall we say," she charged in

Eastern Life,

to a traveller (Mrs. Romer), who coolly reports, without any apparent shame, that she has brought away from Benee Hasan the head and shoulders of a figure which she does not doubt to be that of a Jewish captive; -- her dragoman having cleverly detached from the wall this interesting specimen of antiquity!¹⁴

The summer-like weather on 4 February was in vivid contrast to the "snow eighteen feet deep in Yorkshire" the party now learned of in their letters. When they stopped at a village for milk one afternoon, a man came to the boat for medical advice, and Ewart and Yates gave whatever aid they could. Ominously, the river had now sunk, and Martineau confessed that "we felt rather heavy at heart when we recognized objects . . . which told us we were drawing near to Cairo." On the 8th, they visited the pyramids of "Dahshoor and Sakkára, and the remains of Memphis." Green fields, frightened children, and crude mud bricks "laid out to dry," reminded her of the Hebrews, who now she insisted "were never out of my mind until we reached Damascus." Following a dispute between Alee and the donkey men - who claimed they had been cheated by Europeans the day before - the party "crossed the rich plain, which was very lively from its being market-day" in safety. Women carried loads like those of their husbands: "baskets of charcoal, from the acacia groves; tow, wool, kids carried on the shoulder, &c." At Sakkára, Martineau thought of Herodotus's comments about "the grandeur and wisdom of Egypt."¹⁵

On the day of their expedition to the Great Pyramids, Martineau felt unwell. Afraid to fail "in the sight-seeing of the day," she dreaded letters from home that might tell of "sickness and distress." Nevertheless, "at half-past eight, on fine handsome asses," they set out for Geezeh to meet first "that curious sign of civilisation, - shaven donkeys" with "scarlet housings" and gay riders. ("I was not aware till I came to Egypt, how dependent a donkey is on dress," Martineau commented drolly). At a pond they were surrounded by men from the fields demanding the right to carry the travelers on their shoulders. Their dragoman, however, met the "teasing . . . vigorously, by trying to throw a pertinacious fellow, bigger than himself, into the water." Intent on the pyramid, Martineau did not at first recognize the sphinx and mistook it "for a capriciously-formed rock." At the base of the great pyramid, three "strong and respectable-looking Arabs" then took charge of her, one helping to turn up her gown and tie it in "a most squeezing knot." Gazing upward, she felt "not the magnitude of the Pyramid" but the succession of "bright yellow steps" that seemed a "most fatiguing image!" Trusting to the "strong and steady lifting of the Arabs," hardly stopping and keeping her face towards the pyramid, she reached the top in twenty-two minutes by her watch. At one halt, the Arabs "spotted two of their English words and cried out 'Half-way!'" When she jumped down "a particularly high block," they patted her on the back and cried, "'Ah, ah! good morning; good morning!'" On the top of the pyramid, the "roomy and even platform" allowed the four members of the party to "sit and write," drinking water carried up by an Arab girl and enjoying themselves. As she looked around in all directions, Martineau took note of the geography and spotted "a train of camels, wonderfully diminutive . . . and a few Arab tents . . . pitched not far from the foot of the Pyramid."

After their dramatic ascent of the pyramid, the party made (frightening) sorties into the "King's [and] Queen's Chamber[s]" (Martineau thinking of the tamer Mammoth Cave in Kentucky). At last - after climbing, conversing for forty minutes on the top of the pyramid,

entering the dim passages and eating her lunch - Martineau realized to her astonishment that she had given her trumpet to an Arab to hold *three-and-a-half hours earlier!*

Returning, the party gazed at the Sphinx (still buried to the neck in sand and "rendered ugly by the loss of the nose"), and Martineau recorded grimly that the "stony calm of its attitude" almost turned spectators to stone.

Putting aside a "last clear view into the times of the vanished race," Martineau turned resolutely towards Cairo, for "the cloud curtain" was now drawn over the "living and moving scene which I had studied for so long."¹⁶

Over the next few days Martineau mentally revisited her adventures in writing "Survey from the Pyramid" for the *People's Journal*. Yet she groaned to the editor Saunders over the twelve letters waiting for her at Cairo and vowed to try, but not promise, to send another survey from Jerusalem.

For the journal's "untraveled" readers, Martineau compared the "present famine in Ireland and a trying winter in England" to famines "which occurred in this eastern part of the world several thousands of years ago." She had climbed up "a rough, broken and difficult staircase 480 feet high - the steps being chiefly from four to three feet high." She noted the chattering Arab helpers ("a different race from the people who built the pyramids"), the views of the Nile plain, green crops, Cairo, the eastern hills, the desert and "a crowd of pyramids." In the tombs she had seen pictures of the civilized way of life that Abraham knew, when women sometimes reigned. As a "young slave," Joseph became minister and bought up all the land for the ruler, changing the economy for all time, she lectured. "In various buildings" she had seen the same sort of mud bricks the Israelites were forced to make- yet she no longer wondered at their longing for "the charms of the valley of the Nile." Summarizing the rest of Egyptian history, Martineau looked to a brighter future that would include restoration of "the vast monumental treasure [that] lies beneath the sand."¹⁷

"I like donkey-riding in Cairo," Martineau declared gaily in *Eastern Life*. Having bought a side-saddle "in good repair," she and the others rode for "two hours before the table-d'hôte." With high amusement she watched the "little rogues of donkey-boys" outside the Hotel d'Orient, hustling, kicking, and cuffing for customers, "one displaying his English with 'God save the queen ros bif.'" In the endlessly fascinating streets, they passed water carriers, men smoking "chibouques or serpentine nargeelehs," a barber shaving the head of a kneeling man, a "veiled woman with her tray of bread," the "red and white striped mosque," a scattering of "handsome houses," gentlemen going in and out of Shepherd's Hotel and a craftsman busily at work. Inside a mosque, she saw people chatting, a homeless man sewing and children at play on the marble pavement. The half-finished interior of the "Pasha's new mosque" with alabaster walls already beginning to crumble impressed her as a poor choice of material.

To the party's good fortune, the "fête of the Birth of the Prophet" brought a colorful horde out onto the streets, "men with clean turbans and bright purple tunics [and] ladies with gay silks under their floating balloon mantles of black silk." Poorer Arabs, she thought, especially displayed attractive "muscular strength," fine teeth and "beauty of form and face." On the Sunday of 14 February, "news flew through the city of the return of the Pilgrims from Mekkah." Quickly the resourceful Alee hired "a shop-front in the Turkish bazaar," and "by seven o'clock" Martineau and her friends were seated "on a carpet, at the level of people's shoulders." Musicians, wrestlers, soldiers, and the like soon passed, the party following them

to the open area before the Citadel for a thrilling display of horsemanship.¹⁸

Over the following days, Martineau paid her famed visit to the first of two harems. She knew Milnes's "beautiful poem of 'the Hareem'" and was impressed by the luxurious surroundings, though the notion of polygamy revolted her. The ladies of the harem seemed desperate for the English visitors to stay, yet to sit

hour after hour on the deewán, without any exchange of ideas, having our clothes examined, and being plied with successive cups of coffee and sherbet, and pipes, and being gazed at by a half-circle of girls in brocade and shawls, and made to sit down again as soon as one attempts to rise, is as wearisome an experience as one meets in foreign lands.

The ladies' faces looked "dull, soulless, brutish, or peevish," Martineau thought, their ignorance being "fearful enough" but the grossness seemed sickening. Slavery and polygamy were "two hellish practices" she ranted, while her instinctive openness on this visit and towards a harem in Damascus seemed to counterbalance any prudishness about sex.¹⁹

The Yates' party called on English residents of Cairo like the author and translator Edward William Lane. Lane's nephew, Stanley Poole, took them to see the famous "Magician," whom Martineau deduced was an unconscious mesmerizer. After performing with young boys, the rather "good-looking old gentleman" reluctantly agreed to try to charm Martineau. Within two minutes she could feel his influence and "began to see such odd things" in the pool of ink poured into her hand she thought it best to stop. The "dark-skinned races," whom *she* would have liked to try to mesmerize, were "eminently susceptible" she later declared.

Among the European legations "Mr. and Mrs. Leider of the Prussian Mission" proved especially kind. From Cairo the party made further excursions - to Heliopolis, to a Coptic church and the picturesque Nilometer, "a graduated pillar [set within] a damp, dim chamber, tufted with water weeds."

On their first attempt at camel riding to prepare for the arduous crossing of the Sinai, Martineau and Anne Yates were given "wooden boxes or chairs, instead of saddles." Then finding "the swaying motion . . . excessively disagreeable," they left the chairs behind in exchange for cushioned saddles - Martineau prudently stuffing all her travel items, including paper and ink, into her saddlebags.²⁰

For the journey from Sinai to Jerusalem, the Yates four were asked to join a party of "English, Scotch and Irish" who planned a visit to Petra en route. In the desert, Martineau and Anne slept in a large tent "stoutly lined for warmth at night" where the men "dined and spent the evening." As they rode gaily out of the city their sheikh Bishara was wearing "under his blue burnoose, a brilliant dress of green satinet, striped with red and gold color." Martineau took an immediate dislike to her camel and was astonished at the driver's kissing it repeatedly, coaxing the creature "to stoop and offer its huge lips to the salute."

As they left Cairo, Martineau thought intently about Moses and the Hebrews but was not as convinced as the clergymen of the party that they were strictly following Moses's track. After she had felt "very unwell in Egypt," the excitement seemed temporarily to bolster her health which "improved from week to week." Any woman who can walk "far and easily, and bear the thirst, may set out for Mount Sinai without fear," she asserted in *Eastern Life*, but camel-riding was "wholly insufferable."

In addition to their dragoman Alee, the party had an indefatigable servant, Abasis, who helped put up tents and took charge of "the stores; - the water-skins, flour, biscuit, macaroni, cheese, condiments, butter, eggs, oranges and preserved fruits." He bought, kept, and killed "fowls and sheep," woke the party and by five o'clock gave them breakfast of "fowl or hashed mutton, eggs and toast;" he furnished "boiling water and toast at tea" and cooked the evening dinner. Martineau slept in the tent inside her "Levinge's bag" and (in added words) said she felt safe from flies, beetles, earwigs, and fleas. When breakfast was over in the morning, she liked to walk off "in advance with my courbash (hide whip) and bag, - containing map, book, notebook, goggles and fan." When the sun became too hot, she signaled her camel-driver who forced the beast to kneel: "I sprang on and settled myself with my stirrup and between my cushions, and stowed my comforts about me." As she gripped "the peg before and the peg behind," the camel rose, "and I sustained its three jerks, - two forward and one backward, - as well as I could."

Stops for lunch might be "of not more than twenty minutes" while the baggage camels went on ahead. By three o'clock, the dragomen would begin looking for a place to camp, the sheikh then indicating by his spear a chosen spot. Before changing her clothes for their evening meal, Martineau "tried to sleep for a few minutes, on the sand or some neighbouring rock." Or she smoked her chibouque and wrote in her journal. Anxious to record every nuance of the thrilling journey, she felt her journal "a perpetual irritation and mortification" owing to the impossibility of fully recording the day's "marvelous scenes and new experiences." Yet when the party enjoyed a social "rubber" after dinner, Martineau sometimes wandered off to sing old songs to herself.

On reaching the shore of the Red Sea, they filled pockets and bags with exquisite shells. At Suez on 28 February, Ewart's position as a director of the Peninsular and Oriental Company again proved an advantage. The company agent, a Capt. Linguist, met the Yates party to escort them to a hotel and English Sunday worship. The following day, they sailed to the Arabian side in his boat- only to find that the caravan had gone ahead. Linguist then improvised a lunch at his country house with "butter from Ireland, ale from England, wine from Spain, ham from Germany, bread and mutton from Cairo and Suez, cheese from Holland, and water from Madras!"

Reaching their caravan encampment only at ten that night, they were assaulted next morning by a fierce sandstorm. Martineau then adamantly refused to suffer stinging sand *and* the jolting of her camel and "walked about eight miles." Yet the spirit of the desert captivated her. She loved seeing "a single tree" and rocks that showed "black, green, crimson, lilac, maroon, yellow, golden, and white." On 6 March, they arrived at the convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. There the men were winched up by windlass (as was customary) while the ladies, to their relief, entered through "a well-secured postern."

Following a day's rest at the convent, the group set out to climb Mount Sinai, Martineau deeming it the easiest mountain she had ever ascended owing to steps "for the greater part of the way." From the summit, they made out "the Gulf of Akaba . . . a line of grey between two of sand." Thrilled to be in Bible country, they "lost no time in making . . . arrangements . . . for an ascent of Horeb . . . next day."²¹

In her chapter, "Moses at Mount Sinai" in *Eastern Life*, Martineau cited similar practices of the Hebrews and the ancient Egyptians. In the chapter "From Sinai to Akaba," she pointed

out that they "were now about to set forth on what might be called the most romantic part of our travels," hoping to inspect sites missed by other travelers. At Sinai, they had found a letter "from a gentleman . . . at Cairo" advising them on their route and recommending a certain crafty Sheikh Hussein, who agreed to lead them "through Petra to Hebron" but who would not declare his terms. One morning "in excessive heat," Martineau walked fourteen miles to avoid riding her camel, only mounting when they reached sand. On a "glorious" 13 March, however, they saw "the range of eastern Arabian mountains [and the] little angle of deep blue sea" that indicated the shores of the "Gulf of Akaba, where the fleets of Solomon and Jehoshaphat used to ride." Later in the day, a resting place was found, "where a palm sprang out of the sand . . . some bushes growing near told of fresh water [and] down I went, with Mrs. Y., to bathe, under a little thicket of bushes near our tent." Thereafter throughout this part of their journey, Martineau plunged almost daily into rivers, streams, ponds and even a waterfall.²²

While thrilled to be journeying "on the track of the Hebrews," the travellers became annoyed by the sheikh's demands for money and by quarrels of the camel-drivers. To her disgust, Martineau was no longer allowed to walk ahead, Hussein having ordered the group to stay together. Meanwhile the camels lagged and "went very uneasily."

Six hours from Petra on 19 March, Martineau could hardly believe she would soon be in that fabled place. Then riding first behind the guide, she saw amid oleanders and tamarisks "a square door-way in a pile of white rock." Next amid "red poppies and scarlet anemones and wild oats," she spied "pediments and pilasters and little ranges of door-ways," as frightened eagles soared overhead. "What a mixture of wild romance with the daily life of a city!" she was to exclaim in *Eastern Life*. As she spread her cloak on a rocky shelf to watch the men put up the tents, Yates asked jovially, "'Well, how do you like being at Petra?'"

As the party lingered to examine the wonders of the site, the sheikh became more troublesome. Declaring their bread and ale all consumed, he begged for pipes of tobacco. Now they learned he had brought no food for the camels, expecting them to graze. For the men, he had counted on the charity of the travelers. At once Ewart took over as spokesman, coolly standing up to the sheikh. The latter, Martineau noted dryly, "mistook [Ewart's] moral dignity for that of high birth and station," and declared him to be "one of the greatest men in Europe."

The adventure of Petra had not ended, however, and one night, fierce rain and winds arose. As they explored various caves next day, Martineau became lost with two of the men. Whipping out her pocket compass, she skillfully led them back along the bed of a "water-course" and there barely escaped a sudden muddy torrent. "I shall never forget the sight," she declared. "It was worth any inconvenience and disappointment" of lost hours, damp wardrobes, and discomforts, as on came "the double stream, bowing and waving the tamarisks and oleanders." At last, before sunset, the scene was "lighted by a yellow glow from the west," with the torrent dashing along and "a group of Arabs . . . round a fire, whose smoke curled up above the trees." At night, figures of Arabs appeared everywhere - come up from the country to see the flood - making Martineau feel she had seen Petra "populous once more."

On their last day at Petra, 23 March, the Yates party went exploring toward the north, accompanied by "very fine-looking" armed Arabs. The men's faces were "full of life;" they were civil and yet amused at the travellers' dress and manners. They examined Anne's cloak and Martineau's trumpet, while displaying their muskets, "matchlocks, heavy clubs, and short swords." As the group rode on, they glimpsed magnificent ruins from a "bird's-eye view,"

Martineau especially regretting "leaving unvisited . . . a pyramid perched upon an extraordinary height."

That afternoon the sheikh made new demands, Martineau watching the "capital spectacle, - Alee on his haunches before the iron-faced old man, - the dragoman's mobile countenance now astute, now winning!" At night as she lingered outside, she reminded herself that they would be off in the morning and that "the most romantic vision of the travels of my life would be withdrawn."

Contrary to accounts by famous (other) travellers, Martineau boasted that climbing Mount Hor proved easy, "as rocky ascents usually are, mounting from platform to platform by stones and water-courses." Scrambling to the roof of a ruined tomb, Martineau took "one last view . . . of the boundless Desert."

Next day making their way next day through a wadi, they heard a commotion: the second sheikh "galloped up, rose in his stirrups, shook his spear, flung away his turban . . . and galloped away again, raising the sand in clouds." The camels of the caravan were driven together, and guards mustered. Various sheiks flew about, "giving notice that we were to be attacked by Bedoueens from behind the sandhills." Thrilled at the chance to witness "the grandest of desert sights" Martineau was incensed when an "old negro camel-driver" forced her away. Later it was learned that they had been passing through the territory of a tribe that should have had a share of the sheikh's compensation. Ewart learned too that the camel-drivers had been living on grass for two days, and he immediately ordered rice to be boiled for them out of the parties' stores.²³

¹ Auto. 2: 272; Appen. B, *EL* 3: 339-43; Sir John Gardiner Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt and Thebes: Being a Description of Egypt, including the Information Required for Travellers in that Country* (London: John Murray, 1843): Martineau's list of travel items and itinerary seem taken directly from Wilkinson (see Preface, *EL* 1: vi-vii).

² Auto. 2: 272-80 (Atkinson may have demurred at extended travel with a Liverpool merchant coterie); Isabella Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia, and Palestine, in 1845-6* (London: Richard Bentley, 1846).

³ Auto. 2: 277-79; *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, with Henry G. Atkinson (London: John Chapman, 1851).

⁴ Preface, *EL* 1: v and *EL* 1: 3-9.

⁵ *EL* 1: 10-18.

⁶ *EL* 1: 17-32.

⁷ *EL* 1: 33-79.

⁸ *EL* 1: 80-92.

⁹ *EL* 1: 92-95.

¹⁰ *EL* 1: 96-114.

¹¹ *EL* 1: 114-46; Martineau assured readers the party did not deface any temple or tomb.

¹² *EL* 1: 194-96, 210, and 261 (see "Historical Sketch, from Menes to the Roman Occupation of Egypt" and "Aboo-Simbil. - Egyptian Conceptions of the Gods" [*EL* 1: 147-93 and 194-210], the prelude to Martineau's claim for historical sources of Christian belief); Martineau might refer

partly to the legend noted by George Grote that the Greeks borrowed the name Thebes from Egypt (*A History of Greece* [London: John Murray, 1846-56] 1, chap. 14).

¹³ *EL* 1: 278—2; 17.

¹⁴ *EL* 2: 19 and 35-39; HM to Milnes, 31 January 1847, *CL* 3: 71-74; Karl Richard Lepsius (German Egyptologist, returned from exploring Nile monuments in 1845), *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthgiopien . . .* (Berlin: Nicolai, 18[48]-56) and Jean-François Champollion, French founder of Egyptology; for "Mrs. Romer," see note 2.

¹⁵ *EL* 2: 42-48.

¹⁶ *EL* 2: 62-72 and 81-83 (Martineau must have feared a repetition of her early failures to see a comet or the sea).

¹⁷ "Survey from the Pyramids" (dated "Cairo,—February 14th, [*Past one, a.m., and I have to be up at five.]*"), *People's Journal* 3 (18 March 1847): 148-51 (for Martineau's 8-part survey, "The Holy Land," beginning in the *People's Journal*, 3 July 1848, see chap. 32).

¹⁸ *EL* 2: 116-37.

¹⁹ *EL* 2: 147-61.

²⁰ *EL* 2: 137-46, 183-84 and 187-89; Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Charles Knight, 1836) and *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments: translated by Edward William Lane. With six hundred woodcuts by William Harvey* (London: John Murray, 1853).

²¹ *EL* 2: 191-95 and 199-256; see "The Holy Land. I. Entrance," *People's Journal* 4 (3 July 1847): 1-2.

²² *EL* 2: 263-91 and 292-98.

²³ *EL* 2: 305-21 and 3: 1-41 (images of the ruins at Petra henceforth recurred in Martineau's writings).