

Drawn by Percival Shelton.

KOSEIR,

LOOKING OVER THE MARKET PLACE.

From a Sketch by Dr. Klunzinger.

# UPPER EGYPT: ITS PEOPLE AND ITS PRODUCTS.

A DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
MANNERS, CUSTOMS, SUPERSTITIONS, AND OCCUPATIONS OF  
THE PEOPLE OF THE NILE VALLEY, THE DESERT, AND THE RED SEA COAST,  
WITH SKETCHES OF THE NATURAL HISTORY AND GEOLOGY.

BY

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WITH A PREFATORY NOTICE

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the worthy sacrificial priest or saint's attendant (*nekib*) claims a half or a quarter, the rest being distributed among the poor. From gifts made to it the tomb gradually acquires costly ornaments, and a great jubilee is celebrated every year. In short, the worship of saints has gradually risen into importance, and now is not behind what is practised in the Christian-Catholic Church. It is unknown to the Koran, and therefore the Mohammedan Puritans, the Wehabites of Arabia, would have it expunged from the pure religion of Mohammed along with much else. It is very gratifying to some to stand in the odour of sanctity, to be honoured and feasted by everybody. Such prophets move from place to place, getting their former wondrous works proclaimed abroad, and playing the quack and mountebank. One of these men, whose father is said to have been able to satisfy a whole assembly with a meal that had been served up for himself alone, had the impudence to swindle some £7, 10s. out of a man who wished to have children, under the pretext that this preliminary outlay was necessary to procure drugs, whereupon the favoured of God set sail with the next ship and was never seen again.

#### STATES OF ECSTASY.

Among the Mohammedans, and perhaps throughout the East, it has always been an everyday occurrence for people to fall into a state of ecstasy. Such states are also ascribed to the ginns, who take possession of a person, transform his appearance or "ride" him, and speak and act through him. In the nature of all peoples lies an irresistible tendency towards intoxication, and if wine or spirits are strictly forbidden, as among the Mohammedans, they induce this state by means of opium and hashish, or if their religious scruples cause them to reject these also, they intoxicate themselves with religion itself. The religious dances or *zikrs*, of which we have repeatedly spoken, seem to have been invented for this purpose. After these exercises, which are accompanied by much flinging about of the head and body, and by in-

numerable repetitions of the name of Allah, it is a common occurrence for one or two to fall into an ecstasy. As in the case of alcoholic intoxication one will be in high good humour, another dull and silent, a third quite frantic. Those possessed in this way foam at the mouth, while laboriously persisting in trying to stammer out the name of Allah; at last they fall to the ground in a swoon, or remain standing as stiff and rigid as a pillar, or they rush frantically about and strike at whatever comes in their way. Certain dervishes are said on such occasions even to eat fire, glass, and serpents. The Soudanese are the most addicted to these strange performances; in their leisure hours they know of no better amusement than putting themselves into a state of ecstasy by songs and dances which have always a religious basis. They set some store by the reputation of quickly working themselves into this condition. Though here and there one or two may succeed in becoming really possessed, others merely pretend to be so, and accordingly it happens, that when the police appear upon the scene, the whole of those who immediately before were lying rigid and in ecstasy at once start up and take to their heels.

This ecstatic intoxication has no ulterior consequences. Those possessed awake either of themselves or are roused by the call *la ilah ill Allah Mohammed rasul Allah*, and they then appear as if nothing had happened. Many of the saints that are seen wandering about may have contracted their imbecility through their repeated ecstasies, and people of this sort are more disposed than others to fall down during these pious exercises.

#### THE SAR.

Among the women *zikrs* are not indulged in, but the tendency to ecstasies is even much greater among the more nervous sex, and to gratify this inclination they have adopted a practice which is said to have been introduced by Abyssinian female slaves, and which gradually spread to such an extent that the government felt itself called upon to forbid it. Nevertheless, it is still common among high and low, espe-

cially in Upper Egypt. The *sâr*, a certain ginn, is the powerful genie of sickness, who throws himself upon the women by preference. Whenever a woman is affected by any illness, the causes of which are not as clear as day, the *sâr* is blamed—*'aleha es-sâr*. It is immediately made known that the *sâr* is at so-and-so's house to-day, but the day must be a Saturday, or a Tuesday, or a Thursday. A multitude of women and girls stream to the house of the sick person, and are treated to buza, the half-fermented Arab beer, the favourite drink of the Abyssinians, and to tripe. Songs are now sung, and drums beaten, and the *sâr*-dance is danced—the women placing themselves in a squatting posture, or with their limbs bent under them, and rocking the upper parts of their bodies and their heads this way and that, as is done in the *zikrs*. Some of them are soon seized with the frenzy, and leap frantically about. All the proceedings are under the superintendence of the *shêcha* of the *sâr*, who is a person well known for her tendency towards ecstatic states, and generally a slave, and who earns a good deal of money in this way. When she, as well as others, is in a state of ecstasy she is asked as to the means to be employed to remove the disease. The cure always consists in a simple thick silver finger-ring without a stone, sometimes also bracelets and anklets, and as soon as the greedy *sâr* is satisfied with this the sickness is said to cease. So great is the faith in this remedy that many spend their last penny to procure these silver ornaments, and in entertaining their numerous female visitors.

Like the tarantella dance of the middle ages, the *sâr* is contagious. One woman after another in the company rises up and seems to begin dancing involuntarily, and boys and even men, who are sometimes admitted to these orgies, are affected in the same way. The features of some become altered, they slap their own faces, knock their heads against the wall, weep, howl, and try to strangle themselves, being difficult to restrain; they also give themselves out for other persons, for saints, and especially for the *sâr* himself. They may be asked what it is they wish, and may be shown a silver ring, some henna paste, or buza. They fix a furious

glance upon them, seize them suddenly with wild haste, put on the ring, clutch the henna-paste in their hand, or drink buza. With this as a rule the *sâr* is satisfied and appeased, the party possessed wipes off the perspiration, and now speaks quietly and reasonably as before. On a day appointed for the *sâr* the attack is often repeated, ending as at first when the person's wish is gratified, and that is often strange enough.

These states are not pretended, that is clear—why indeed should the parties beat and often seriously injure themselves? They are cases of acute delirium, of ecstasy. The spiritualist will call these persons mediums, the believer in animal magnetism will say they are "magnetized." We remember reading in the report of a doctor attached to the English Abyssinian expedition that a girl suddenly conceived the idea that she was a wolf and ran off at such a rate that no one could catch her till at last she found a bone. This she devoured with the eagerness of a hungry wolf, whereupon she instantly returned to her senses. This case is quite similar to that of our *sâr*-possessed women, and Abyssinia is the native country of the *sâr*.

## POPULAR MEDICINE.

Since all diseases cannot be cured by talismans, reading, dancing, and vows, an extensive system of popular medicine has developed itself side by side with these, which is based upon more tangible remedies. That a number of these are effective enough is not to be denied, and they agree pretty well with those that experience has taught physicians. For example, zinc or alum is a chief ingredient in all eye powders, compounds of lead in drugs applied to wounds and eczema, as well as astringent vegetable substances, especially fenugreek (*Trigonella fœnum-græcum*). Among those much used are "good oil," that is, olive-oil (used as a lotion in rheumatism and skin diseases), fennel, coriander, caraway ("corn of blessing"), mallows, mint, opium, saltpetre, sal-ammoniac, sulphur, green and blue vitriol, and litharge; as purgatives are used, epsom salts, senna leaves, tamarinds,

Other angels or kings of the ginn (*mélek*) are—Leltahtilin, Mahtahtilin, Kahtahtilin, Fahtahtilin, Nahtahtilin, Gelhatabtilin, Lamakfengel—the last being the greatest. The initial letters of the others give the name of the last.

A certain angel or king of the ginn is called Meitataru; he dwells in one of the seven heavens. When incense is burned on the earth he smells it, and waving his rod, he commands his subjects to attend to the matter and stand at the service of the person offering the incense. Another, like the Christian ginn-king Kim, is attracted by the smell of the opercula of shells burned as incense.

Falling stars are wicked angels or devils hurled down by God. It is they who teach men the black art, the evil kind of magic. Accordingly it is a matter of duty for every believer to say, when he sees a shooting star, "I take refuge with God from the stoned devil."

## ASTROLOGY.

The ever visible splendour of the tropical or subtropical starry firmament is a powerful inducement to its study. The stars also serve people in general as a nocturnal clock; to the traveller, and especially the mariner, they serve as guides. As in these latitudes the winds have a very regular course, corresponding to the season of the year, and the stars show what season it is, the seaman is perhaps right when he is afraid of such and such a star in a certain position (Labemir, for instance, when in the west at evening), and looks upon it as an unlucky star, while he considers others lucky stars. Such views, however, lead gradually to the fantastic domain of astrology, and there are few who would venture to deny the influence of the stars upon the fate of mankind. Both Christians and Mohammedans occupy themselves with astrology. A special literature teaches how to detect this influence, one of the books among others being "the true and accurate book of the renowned Greek (?) philosopher, Abu Moshaër, the great astronomer." More important for this science, however, than the knowledge of the starry vault is

that of the Abged. Every letter of the alphabet corresponds to a certain number; B, *biduh*, for example, corresponds to 2468, but the letters are not arranged as at present, not A, B, T, Th, &c., but A, B, G, D (hence Abged).

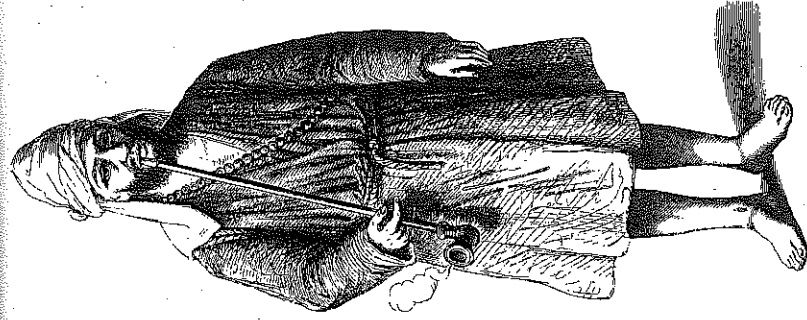
There are twelve constellations for men and twelve for women. The Abged number of the name of the man on whose behalf astrology is to be consulted has to be found, together with the name of his mother. From this number subtract 1212, and if the remainder is 1, the Ram is his constellation and his planet Mars; his temperament, therefore, is the sanguineous. If 2 is the remainder, his constellation is the Bull and his planet Venus; his temperament is "earthy," that is, phlegmatic; and so on. This art teaches also to know whether a sick person will die, whether something lost will be found, an affair turn out well, or what will be the general course of the coming year. Many earn their bread by making such calculations, and there is no lack of believers even among the higher ranks; numbers of people allow themselves to be guided in matters of the highest importance by these astrologers and calculators, who often have the effrontery to take a sum of money in advance, and when the time arrives for the fulfilment of their prophecy they are far enough away.

#### GEOMANTISTS AND GYPSIES.

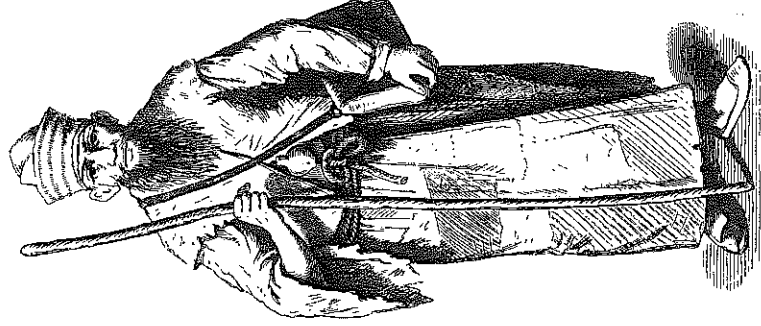
Geomantists, who practise the *darb er-raml*, are generally Soudanese. At every yearly market may be seen a few of these black and half-naked prophets squatting on the ground, making holes and lines in the sand, throwing upon these a few stones as dice, and predicting therefrom for a few coppers the future joys and sorrows of the people. Gypsy women, too, may be seen sitting there, telling fortunes in their usual manner by the lines on the palm of the hand, or by shells, which here serve instead of a pack of cards.

#### THE FUTURE.

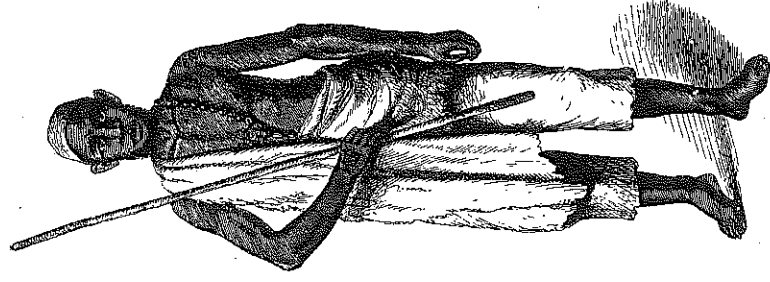
Of all prophecies those of the Prophet are the most important. They are not openly set forth in "the perspicuous book,"



TRAVELLING DERVISH FROM THE FAYOUM.



TRAVELLING DERVISH FROM KHORASAN.



TAKBURI OR FREE NEGRO OF DARFOUL.