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THE HANDMAID OF CLIO

But you have been to Palestine—alas !
Some minds improve by travel, others, rather
Resemble copper wire, or brass,
Which gets the narrower by the going farther.—HOOD.
Don't you be an old Fuss-pot.—SMALL PERSON OF TENDER YEARS.

A VERSE of Omar Khayyám pictures a soul in the likeness of a caravan starting in the early twilight for the Dawn of Nothing; when the wain stands slantwise with two stars yet hidden under the earth, a film of grey light engrailing the lace of the dog-tooth hills, and the cold air of the dead night shivers the aglets of the tamarisks. The crescent is wan with a herald sun-ray which presently kisses the top of the old minaret : a door opens and a priest, coming to the parapet, recites his call to prayer, *There is no God but God*, and one by one the wakening worshippers spread their carpets to offer their morning orison.

So, in parable, are those two spent nations Assyria and Egypt, caravans which set forth bravely on a long journey to end in nothingness

and vanity, while now the lands of the Caliphs and Sultans are, in large compass, an urn to hold their ashes. Through yesterday's seven thousand years the peoples of these empires rose and fell, surging to and fro over each other's lands as their tides ebbed and flowed ; Sumerians coming from the unknown, perhaps from the East by Persia, and settling by the mouth of the Two Rivers on the Indian Sea, making the beginning of their kingdom Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar, and bringing their picture-writing now turned to angular wedges from the needs of plastic clay : Semites thrusting themselves forward from Arabia, and ousting those prime settlers ; but, in their ignorance of writing, adopting the Sumerian alphabet to express their daintier speech, however clumsily. These, pushing forward, ever hugging the rivers, went forth out of the land of Babylonia and builded Ashur and Calah and Nineveh : and thus lay Assyria along the Tigris, flanked on the east by the line of the Persian hills, and on the south-west by the Syrian desert, which shut the dwellers in Mesopotamia in with a funnel-opening to the north and north-west, until the mountains blocked their permanent occupation. North-west by the Euphrates and beyond lay the Hittite country, Carchemish, Kadesh, and up to Pteria, known now as Boghaz Keui, as far as Smyrna ; westwards the Phoenician traders, and Hebrews, settling there from some migration of the Semitic stock ; and

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then, up the Nile valley, another great power, Egypt. But now Nineveh and Memphis are fallen, and the mounds of their decay are but sandpies for such as choose to grope therein for treasure. Truly, as Aurelius saith, "The Chaldaei foretold the deaths of many, and then fate caught them too."

He who would follow this trade, digging for the pot of gold beneath the rainbow, seeking the peculiar treasure of kings who like chimney-sweepers have come to dust, plants a root with many future ramifications, now plying as a comfortable stay-indoors, mending pots, now voyaging to the uttermost ends of earth to fossick in antique mixens. In this bifurcation of employ he will spend long days under a blazing sun or in bitter cold, a little king in Babylon ruling his feofs, ever measuring, scribing, drawing: the smallest pieces have for him their significance, and a written stone raises his expectations to a zenith. Then will he return to the dullness of steam, electricity, and policemen, tracing the *vestigia* which his spades have discovered for him, reading the enigmas of his hieroglyphics, or comparing this and that bursten crock to publish the affinity of lost tribes. Was ever a hunt for pirates' treasure more fascinating—could Long John Silver or Basil Ringrose offer a greater bait? It may be that in to-morrow's expectancy of years men of science shall consider the results of Archæology and its sister Anthropology of to-day

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as more important than any other contemporary research, for their evidence is transient and not like that of Natural Science, abiding.

Such a pursuit has grown into a healthy philosophy, and the contumely of the Middle Ages of the nineteenth century towards all oppositions of science falsely so called is almost as forgotten as its Great Exhibitive utilitarians, who were shrewd enough to appropriate their wives' property and rule their household with a minatory Bible, being thus near akin to the devil by reason of their apt Scripture citations ; who found the discoveries of the growing science out of accord with the source of their authority. True, even now there are some who wrest each archæological truth into agreement with Hebrew writ, being seekers after preferment ; but the trade of antiquary incurred its greatest damnation in our fathers' eyes, in that it was like that of Cosmas and Damian unfee'd. Did not Ecclesiasticus say rightly, He that teacheth a fool is as one that glueth a potsherd together ?

Yet many there are even to-day who have run after a substantial and life-long monotony, mis-calling this a beneficent regularity, who cannot see virtue in labour of little hire ; following the dull eye-glazing round of counting-house ledger-men, they are a giganity hedged about in all matters with perversity of ignorance. Truly the poet Arnold hath said, " Most men in a brazen prison live " ; they hold questions and genealogies

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as foolish, and look with chryso-aristocratic disgust on the emptiness of those who spend their lives trying to piece the obscurity between the Now and the Then, as Britomart her sulphurous curtain. True, if hire were the only reward of her service, then Clio is a niggard mistress, hesitating not to show her bondsman that little of his labour is for his mouth; nay, one had almost said that if at the end she grant him Charon's obol, he would be at bequeathing it to a glass case. But the Digger shall know good days when the basket-men carry out the dust of forgotten palaces, disclosing their glories, and that compelling eagerness, leashed to restraint lest haste should be a spoiler, spying the sampled corner of a chiselled monument all delicately carven, bared by an Arab pickaxe, and the sweet delights of prying out its secret runes. His vision shall lengthen itself in the leagues of splendid distance of champaign, without blind butts to check his sight or trammel his freedom, a hundred men shall do his bidding, a horse shall carry him. For all this he shall pay sceat in hunger, thirst or sickness, and in the end shall account it worth his pains a hundred times, this musty, dryasdust trade of archæology. And to consider a collection of beautiful handiworks is like hearing a cathedral's anthem.

But besides the scornful magi of agiotage, the apprentice shall meet many witless folk who voyage lightly in Asia and Africa, and wilfully or

through ignorance transgress the landmarks which divide the white from the brown : for each of the English who sojourn in the East is heir to the traditions of the British *Rāj*, the honour of an ancestral inheritance which must not be tarnished by untoward heedlessness, and it is well to take care lest peradventure one inconsiderate act bring discredit. Some (but these are of low caste) vilify what they think to be their own kind to low-caste native men, affecting to believe in a universal equality of brotherhood ; these are few, but their words are published abroad in the bazaars as though bearing the impress of authority. There are others like them, who, being men, yet have lived so long beneath the protection of guards and physicians, knowing neither hunger nor thirst, that their likeness of manhood is changed ; these stir up popular commotion in sympathy for any Oriental assassins. For, not living amid volcanic peoples, they jeopardize not their own lives by their sentiment, or, being barren, they need no thought for the sons who rule these lands ; and thus, by hating their friends, think also that they thus love their enemies in obedience to the precept. Others (and these are females) in sport wear that pertaining to an Eastern man in the sight of the markets, or don an Arab boy's garb as a dress to dance in, or bear themselves lightly towards donkey-boys and handsome, black-avised truckmans, thus earning an evil name for English ladies in the privy converse of lewd fellows.

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