

**SHALL WE ANNEX EGYPT? REMARKS
UPON THE PRESENT ASPECT OF THE
EGYPTIAN QUESTION, FOUNDED
UPON OBSERVATIONS MADE IN THE
COUNTRY WHILST TRAVELLING IN THE
DELTA AND IN THE SOUDAN**

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Shall we annex Egypt? Remarks upon the present aspect of the Egyptian question, founded upon observations made in the country whilst travelling in the Delta and in the Soudan by William Stone

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THE SOUDAN.*

BY

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PREFACE.

HAVING travelled in parts of Egypt where scarcely any Englishmen have been before, a short account of what I saw and noted in the Soudan and on my way thither up the Nile, in 1882, may not be without interest at the present juncture of affairs. I have also in the following pages endeavoured, and I hope not unsuccessfully, to give a decided answer to the question asked on the title-page.

I have spoken plainly and without circumlocution, because I believe the time is past for mincing words.

W. S.

14, STRATTON STREET, PICCADILLY, W.

April, 1884.

SHALL WE ANNEX EGYPT?

THERE are a great many writers upon Egypt at the present time, many talkers, and still more readers of articles upon Egyptian affairs. Members of Parliament have their say upon the subject, and local politicians re-echo the arguments employed by either side of the House. Yet a vast amount is talked about Egypt, and countless pages and columns are written week after week, so incorrect in facts and deductions, as to cause any one really acquainted with that country to smile. When politicians and writers depart from stern facts and indulge in romancing, they naturally flounder in a quagmire of vague possibilities, anticipated contingencies, weakly probabilities, and slender hopes. Facts are stern disciplinarians, with which it is much to be regretted that many of those who pose as authorities upon Egyptian affairs are not better acquainted. The political and monetary discussions and wranglings inside and outside of the House on the Egyptian question not infrequently show a deplorable ignorance of the real national interests which are at stake. No wonder the country is distracted about Egypt, if it be not already sick of the subject, as it is of Ireland, and is beginning to regard it as a disease for which there is no remedy. The thinking part of the community

are in doubt as to what to believe of all they hear and read; the ignorant and thoughtless are in a hopeless state of fog and bewilderment. Our armies go to Egypt and fight; our men are slain; we win sanguinary conflicts; we lose disastrously; we send reinforcements; we mow down like grass thousands of Arabs who had shown more heroism than had ever been known in ancient or modern times; we withdraw our troops; we send financial advisers; we take them away; we send the greatest Arabic scholar in the world presumably under the guise of a camel-buyer, and he, to the great loss of Europe, is killed; we assume the protectorate of the country, and anon we give the country up to every kind of internal disorder and intestine war. I have not placed these items in any particular order; but they are the facts which, speaking generally, are alone present in the minds of the vast mass of Englishmen when thinking about Egypt. The feeling is consequently abroad in this country, and very widely spread, that our recent Parliaments have not managed Egyptian affairs in a satisfactory manner. Results are all the masses care for; sentiments and opinions dwindle into thin air long before they reach the thousand; results only remain. Now the harvest of results of our connection with Egypt which we are reaping at the present time is by every one declared to be most unsatisfactory. How long the people of England will submit to a continuation of the tinkering which have been carried out upon the Egyptian kettle I know not; but I believe they have nearly had enough of the noise, unaccompanied as it has

been with any good results, and at the next General Election will insist upon the inauguration of a policy rational in design and decided in character. Candidates who cannot decide as to the course England should pursue will, I fancy, stand little chance of succeeding with the long-suffering electors. Candidates who will take the trouble to unravel for themselves the truth about Egypt and its bearing upon Imperial interests, and to divest the question of the useless verbiage which it has gradually accumulated, and to present the subject to the constituencies in its naked and unadorned reality, will most certainly obtain a hearing, and will, I believe, secure the support of numbers of electors of both parties. It takes a considerable time in England for interest in any subject to be roused. But it is English that, when once fairly aroused, matters are carried to an issue. That general public attention is being awakened about Egypt is evident on all sides. As that careful and exact speaker the Duke of Argyll said in the House of Lords only a few weeks ago, the interest felt in this subject is no mere interest on the part of the Egyptian bondholders; it is no mere agitation of the press; it is a deep feeling among all parties in this country, that, however reluctantly, or however much under circumstances over which we can have no control, yet, as a matter of fact, this country has been placed with regard to Egypt in a position of paramount responsibility.

The reason for the deplorable amount of haze upon Egyptian affairs is not far to seek. Of the innumerable writers and talkers upon Egypt, in

reality a mere fractional percentage know anything at all about the country itself. In the first place, comparatively few English people visit Egypt, and of those who do the vast majority go no farther than Cairo. Again, not more than about ten per cent. of the tourists go into the country farther than the first cataract, Philæ at its upper end being usually the limit of their travels. These tourists as a rule stick closely to the river, they travel in companies, hold no converse with the natives, and come away as well informed upon the state of the country and the wants of the inhabitants as when they entered Cairo. Above Philæ, as far as the second cataract—that is, about 800 miles from Cairo—a few go, but their numbers may be counted by twos and threes; while beyond that it may truly be said that a traveller is a rare phenomenon. Now Egypt stretches south from Cairo for some 2000 miles, and he who remains in Cairo is as well acquainted with the land of Egypt as a Londoner who never moved out of London, and who could not read, would be of Scotland and Scotch affairs. For such a man to write about Scotland, or to lead public opinion, would be manifestly absurd. Yet many writers and bookmakers think that a residence in Cairo, or a trip to the first cataract, makes them authorities on the Egyptian question. The honest truth is that Cairo and the Nile to the first cataract as much represent Egypt as Leicester Square and Soho, with its teeming French population, can be said to represent London. Travelling, as I have, in Egypt with an unbiased mind, having no pecuniary interest

in the country, and having followed the Nile for some 300 miles south of Khartoum, journeying through desert as well as through luxuriantly fertile land, it was impossible for me not to come to certain conclusions concerning the country and our connection therewith. As an ordinary Englishman travelling with my eyes open, eager to see all that was to be seen, to hear opinions from the poor as well as the rich, from the tax-paying as well as the ruling population, from the Fellaheen as well as from Sheikhs and Arabs, and using every opportunity to gather information, there was only one conclusion to which I could come—that *England must sooner or later annex Egypt*. This opinion was forcibly endorsed when I travelled in the Soudan, and as I was there as recently as 1882, a few notes from my diary made on the spot may at the present juncture of affairs not be without interest. But before giving an account of my journey in this little visited but wonderfully capable and interesting part of Egypt, I may as briefly as possible recall the main features of the Egyptian question, divesting the subject of all but essentials. I shall take for granted that it is considered of the highest importance that England should preserve her dominion in the East—that the Queen should remain Empress of India. There are a few, I know, who would willingly see our Indian empire drift into other hands, but the vast, the overwhelming majority of Englishmen, think differently. To this majority only are these remarks addressed. It is worthy of note, for the fact has significance, that England has