

# THE YOUTH'S COMPANION

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For All The Family*

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THIS IS ONE OF THE MONTHS WHEN A FARMER C'N BEGIN TO QUIT GROW-IN' ALL THE TIME—AND BEGIN TO GARNER IN A WAY EARLY APPLES GARDEN TRUCK FRYIN' CHICKENS..I DON'T KNOW ANY BETTER FEELIN' THAN TO KNOW YOUR FOOD IS GROWIN' RIGHT UNDER YOUR EYES AND NOT BE BEHOLDEN TO ANYBODY ELSE FOR IT..IT'S EARNED FOOD—AND THAT MAKES IT GOOD FOOD TO MY WAY OF LOOKIN' AT IT!

—CALEB PEASLEE'S ALMANAC

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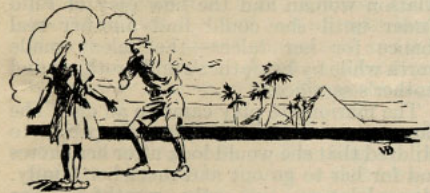
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# CROCODILES AND MAGIC

By George A. Reisner

**I**N the spring of 1919, the Harvard-Boston Egyptian Expedition was encamped on the desert at a village called El-Kur'uw, about ten miles below the Fourth Cataract on the Nile. The camp consisted of a one-story hut with four rooms, a big dining tent and four dressing tents. We slept out of doors on camp beds, and rose before sunrise in order to get as much work done as possible in the cool of the day. In March the weather became hot, but we had discovered the pyramids of four kings of Egypt, the tombs of their queens and the graves of their horses. So we held on to the end of April.

There are very good fish in the Nile in the cataract region, and because in hot weather a diet of meat is not good for the health I had ordered the cook to give us fish every day. About the beginning of April our supply of fish suddenly ceased for three days. I called up the head foreman, Said Ahmed Said, who has been with me for twenty-five years, ever since he was a small boy of seven,



Where are the Fish?

and bade him look into the matter. Later in the day he came back smiling and said the fishermen would not go out in their boats on the river.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because there is a crocodile now in the water of this village," he replied.

"But there are always crocodiles about," I objected.

"Yes, but this one is a different crocodile. It has come from Old Dongola (about forty miles down stream) and is really a man of Old Dongola who has the power to change himself into a crocodile. When he gets hungry he does not wish to eat the people of his own village, so he swims to some other place; and when he has eaten he goes back home and turns into a man again."

"That is mere nonsense," said I.

"Yes, I know. But the fishermen believe it, and they refuse to go out on the river until this crocodile has gone home."

A day or two later General Sir Herbert Jackson Pasha, the British governor of the province, had a shot at the crocodile and missed. As the Pasha is a mighty hunter who has about twenty stuffed crocodiles shot by himself, the people refused to believe that he had missed. They said: "Oh, no, he hit it, of course; but this is a magician, not a crocodile, and ordinary bullets do not hurt it." So we went without fish for ten days. The people had been so careful of their animals and themselves that the crocodile was finally starved out and went elsewhere.

The way a crocodile gets its food is to lie in wait in the shallow water about the places where the flocks of sheep and goats are driven down to the water to drink. They rush in, knock one of the animals over with a slap of their great horny tails, seize it, and make for deep water. Occasionally they take a child or an old woman. And it is because of the damage these reptiles do that the British governors shoot a crocodile every chance they get. Crocodiles also attack people in boats, especially fishermen who have to lean over the side, and endeavor to knock them out of the boat with their tails.

An Englishman, an official in the irrigation department, once told me that he had been hunted by a crocodile while fishing from a boat. Leaning over the side, he saw the eye ridge of a crocodile's head come up about a hundred yards away and immediately sink down out of sight. He knew at once he was being hunted by the reptile and remained leaning over the side, but watchful. A few seconds later the wicked eyes appeared and sank again about forty yards away, and the fisherman leaned back into the boat out of the way. In a moment a great black scaly tail flashed up, swept the side of the boat and swirled away.

Down south, in the province of Sennar,

there is a small tribe or family who have learned to take crocodiles alive by "tickling" them. Mr. Hussey, one of the British inspectors, discovered this family and took a photograph of the tickling of a crocodile, which he has published in an English scientific magazine. The process seems very dangerous; the men who hunt in this way hold a little piece of the root of a magical plant between the teeth, and they believe that as long as they have this "crocodile root," as they call it, no harm can come to them from a crocodile. I have myself seen a snake-charmer hold a similar piece of wood in his teeth to protect himself from poisonous snakes.

## Capturing the Crocodile

To return to the crocodile-tickling. The hunters mark down a crocodile dozing on the bottom in shallow water. One of them, stripped naked and with the "crocodile root" between his teeth, slips into the water and slowly approaches the reptile's tail from behind—moving as slowly as a chameleon on a tree branch. As soon as he can reach the end of the tail, he begins tickling the sides with the tips of his fingers. The crocodile remains motionless, and the hunter, continuing the tickling operation, moves slowly until he is astraddle the crocodile and tickling him just behind the front legs. Here he stands rubbing softly with the tips of his fingers, to the huge delight of the crocodile, while a companion slips into the water and fastens the noose of a rope round the body of the crocodile in front of the hind legs. Three or four assistants then begin to drag the crocodile by the rope backwards. The tickler continues his operation, and the crocodile takes no note of the fact that he is emerging from the water or even that he is out on the bank; Mr. Hussey reports that the reptile grunted with satisfaction at the tickling after it was on dry land.

It seems a frightful treachery that, after enticing the crocodile in this pleasant way, the hunters should kill and eat him. Crocodile meat enjoys no great reputation among white men as an article of food. I have known only one man who has tried it, and he said that the meat is tough and tastes very fishy. The hides, however, have a value besides what comes from being stuffed to sell to tourists, and the natives tell me that each male crocodile contains a little sac of musk that is useful for making the strong perfume that the Orientals love.

In ancient Egypt the crocodile was the tribal god, named Sebek, of the province of Fayum, and a great temple dedicated to him stood in the chief city, which the Greeks afterwards called "Crocodilopolis." The Greek geographer, Strabo, visited this place and speaks of sacred crocodiles wearing gold earrings and other ornaments fastened in punctures in the horny hide. These sacred crocodiles were mummified when they died.

A very interesting crocodile story is told in a hieratic papyrus called the Westerm papyrus, first translated by Professor Erman of Berlin. This papyrus, which was prob-

ably written about 2000 B.C., says that old King Cheops, who built the great pyramid at Giza, once had his sons tell him stories of the magicians of former times. The first story is lost, but it seems to have been about magic performed by Imhotep, the great architect of King Zoser. The second is the crocodile story, and was told by Chephren, who was afterwards king of Egypt and built the second great pyramid at Giza. He said that in the reign of King Nebka, about a hundred years before, there was a magician named Weba-oner, to whom a certain young man had done a great injury. The magician learned that this young man went at certain times to bathe in a lake belonging to the magician. So he called for his casket of ebony and gold, and with his magical implements he made a crocodile of wax, seven handbreadths long. He spoke a charm over the crocodile, saying: "Whoever comes to bathe in my lake, seize him." Then he gave it to his steward to throw into the water after the young man, when he went to bathe. When the wax image touched the water, it became a live crocodile, seven ells (thirteen feet) long, which seized the young man and held him in its mouth. When the steward told Weba-oner, the magician said nothing for seven days, and the young man was in the water without breathing. On the eighth day King Nebka came into the garden, and Weba-oner went before him and said: "Will Your Majesty come and see a marvel which has happened in your reign?" So they went to the bathing place, and Weba-oner called

to the crocodile: "Bring the young man here." And it came forth holding him in its mouth. His Majesty, King Nebka, was afraid of the crocodile and said to Weba-oner: "Excuse me, but this crocodile is very frightful." So the

magician stooped and took up the crocodile, and it became a small wax image in his hand. Then he related to the king the injury that the young man had done him, and the king commanded the crocodile to take its prey. So the wax image became once more a live crocodile, seized the young man and plunged with him into the lake, never to be seen again.

Then Prince Chephren, who had told the story, said to his father: "Behold, that is a miracle which the chief lector-priest performed in the time of your ancestor, King Nebka." And King Cheops ordered, saying: "Let one thousand loaves of bread, one hundred jars of beer, an ox and two measures of incense be offered to the ka of King Nebka; a cake, a jar of beer, a large roast of meat and one measure of incense to the magician, Weba-oner." And it was done.

This offering of food to the dead was one of the most essential practices of the Egyptian religion. Like many other primitive people, the Egyptians believed that life after death was in a world of spirits, but exactly like life on earth. The soul, or ka, of a man looked just like the man when alive and needed food, drink and entertainment as before death. Therefore, every tomb had an offering place above ground where food and drink could be laid for the use of the dead;

and on the walls of this offering place, which was a room, pictures were painted or carved showing the man eating at table with his wife, hunting in the swamps with his children, watching the counting of his herds or the plowing of his fields, playing games, and doing many other things in which the Egyptians found pleasure.

When a funerary priest recited the magic formula that conveyed the spirits of the offerings to the ka of a man, he said: "May the king give an offering, Anubis, lord of the beautiful land [that is, the land of the dead]. May he give bread, beer, cakes and all good clean things for the soul of —," and then he named the man with all his titles. Anubis was the god of the dead, but Osiris was also named and other gods. Now last winter, the Harvard-Boston Expedition found the tomb of a son of King Cheops, and on the walls of his offering place some enemy of the prince had erased his name wherever it occurred, and had hacked away the magical scenes carved for the benefit of the prince. The person who hated the prince had destroyed his name in order that the priests might not know the name to use in the offering formula. Thus he thought to condemn the prince to go hungry, thirsty and naked through all time, or perhaps to perish miserably.

## Giving without Losing

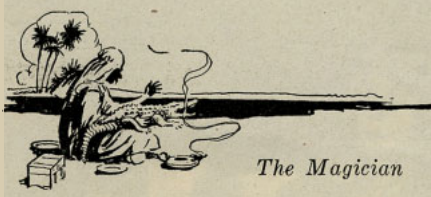
The ancient Egyptian custom of offering food at the grave persists to the present day in Egypt. On the day of each of the two great Mohammedan festivals, in the gray dawn, family parties of peasants may be seen making their way through the fields to the cemetery on the desert. The women carry baskets of bread, which they lay beside the grave, and then they squat on the ground in the little enclosure. The scribes go about and when requested read a certain chapter of the Koran over and over, perhaps a hundred or two hundred times. They are usually paid in bread from the offerings and adjust the number of their recitations to the probable reward, judging by the supply in the baskets. After the ceremony, which lasts a few hours, no family may eat of the bread offered to their own dead. The rich people give it away to the poor, and on that day the cemeteries are thronged with beggars. The poor cannot afford to give away good food, and so the women manage the affair very cleverly. The men pretend not to know what is being done; but Fatimah and Lateefa, being neighbors, have already noted that each has about the same amount of bread. So at the last moment they exchange baskets, and each family has given to the poor without any loss to itself.

Then they return to the village, and all have on brand-new clothes, the little girls in red or green or yellow gowns, of plush if possible, with gayly embroidered caps on their heads. Everyone goes about to his friends saying, "May you be prosperous and well all the year," and there are cakes and meats to eat everywhere, and coffee in little cups. The sellers of sweets go through the streets carrying a long pole with fluttering ribbons; and about the pole are twisted two ropes of white and pink taffy, from which they twist off bits to sell. The long day comes to an end, and soon after dark people go to sleep, most of them on mats on the floor, but well-fed at any rate for that one day.

If you ask them why they bring bread to the graves, they answer, "It is our custom; we have always done so." Though they do not know it, the peasant women of Egypt have practiced this custom for over five thousand years, and proof of the antiquity of the belief on which the custom rests has been found in the graves of Egyptians of the stone age, when they used flint arrows and spears and stone battle axes.



Crocodile Tickling



The Magician