

## Flora and Fauna

### DOM AND DATE PALMS

The perseæ, a sacred plant among the ancient Egyptians, is a bushy tree or shrub, which attains the height of eighteen or twenty feet under favourable circumstances, and bears a fruit resembling a date, with a subacid flavour.

The bark is whitish, the branches gracefully curved, the foliage of an ashy grey, more especially on its under surface. Specially characteristic of Egypt, though not altogether peculiar to it, were the papyrus and the lotus—the *Cyperus papyrus* and *Nymphæa lotus* of botanists.

The papyrus was a tall smooth reed, with a large triangular stalk containing a delicate pith, out of which the Egyptians manufactured their paper.

The fabric was excellent, as is shown by its continuance to the present day, and by the fact that the Greeks and Romans, after long trial, preferred it to parchment.

The lotus was a large white water-lily of exquisite beauty.

Kings offered it to the gods; guests wore it at banquets; architectural forms were modelled upon it; it was employed in the ornamentation of thrones. Whether its root had the effect on men ascribed to it by Homer may be doubted; but no one ever saw it without recognizing it instantly as "a thing of beauty," and therefore as "a joy for ever."

Nor can Egypt have afforded in ancient times any very exciting amusement to sportsmen.

At the present day gazelles are chased with hawk and hound during the dry season on the broad expanse of the Delta; but anciently the thick population scared off the whole antelope tribe, which was only to be found in the desert region beyond the limits of the alluvium.