

Camels always caught his attention, they 'amuse & amaze me . . . only I wish they would not roar and snarl so'; while the crocodiles kept themselves well out of sight.

Taking in Thebes with the sites of Karnak and Luxor, the travellers had reached Aswan and the First Cataract by the end of January. A little further south, at the island of Philae, sacred to the goddess Isis, Lear parted with some of his fellow travellers; and while they set off towards the Second Cataract, he stayed on the island, which was celebrated both for its ruins and natural beauty: 'I have been here 8 whole days, & am very glad I decided on not going further south, as this most beautiful place alone has enough to occupy an artist for months. We did not bring our boat up here, but, transporting a portion of luggage, beds, cookery things etc. we came here by land, - swept out rooms in the great temple, & have been quite comfortable in them during our stay . . . we have had dinner parties, & music every evening nearly' . . . 'The Nile is divided here into several channels, by other rocky islands, & beyond you see the desert & the great granite hills of Assuan.' The impression that Philae, its Ptolemaic Temple of Isis and the Kiosk of Trajan made on Lear was immense: after his return home, he painted numerous oils depicting most romantic views of the island, but it also left a humorous legacy (fig. 5):

There was an Old Person of Philae, whose conduct was dubious and wily;
He rushed up a palm when the weather was calm,
And observed all the ruins of Philae.

After this extravagant camping trip, Lear returned to Cairo, which he reached in mid-March 1854, slightly earlier than he anticipated. At this time, the Nile cruise downstream was generally undertaken more slowly than the up-river trip, allowing for longer stays at individual sites including the Valley of the Kings: 'We mean to stay 2 days at Assouan, which is very beautiful, & then we start down the river slowly, stopping at Kom Ombos, Silsilis, Edfoo, Esneh, & then at Thebes for some time . . . & stay 10 or 12 days.' Back in Cairo, Lear finally met up with Holman Hunt, who had arrived in Egypt; but rather than joining him on a trip to the Holy Land, he returned to London to avoid further cost, none the less pleased with his sketches.

In December 1866 Lear was back in Egypt. This time he arrived on the P&O steamer *Pera*, from Marseilles to Alexandria, and now wanted to travel further up the Nile than on his last trip and finally visit Nubia. But prices were high owing to demand from the rising number of tourists. In order to be able to afford this expensive journey to the Second Cataract and Abu Simbel, Lear had to borrow money from his friends and patrons in the hope that his watercolour sales would repay his expenses.

FIG. 5
THE OLD MAN OF PHILAE



There was an Old Person of Philæ, whose conduct was dubious and wily ;
He rushed up a palm when the weather was calm,
And observed all the ruins of Philæ.