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Chapter 1 : Donovan Pasha, and Some People of Egypt – Volume 2 - Gilbert Parker - Literature

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It is not a book which was planned, and how at last it came to be written. The reception of *Donovan Pasha* convinced me beyond peradventure, that the step I took in enlarging my field of work was as wise in relation to my art as in its effect upon my mind, temperament and faculty for writing. I knew Egypt by study quite as well as I knew the Dominion of Canada, the difference being, of course, that the instinct for the life of Canada was part of my very being itself; but there are great numbers of people who live their lives for fifty or seventy or eighty years in a country, and have no real instinct for understanding. There are numberless Canadians who do not understand Canada, Englishmen who know nothing of England, and Americans who do not understand the United States. If it is so that I have some instinct for the life of Canada, and have expressed it to the world with some accuracy and fidelity, it is apparent that the capacity for understanding could not be limited absolutely to one environment. That I understood Canada could not be established by the fact that I had spent my boyhood there, but only by the fact that some inner vision permitted me to see it as it really was. That inner vision, however, if it was anything at all was not in blinders, seeing only one section of the life of the world. The reception given *Donovan Pasha* convinced me that neither the vision nor the craftsmanship had wholly failed, whatever the degree of success which had been reached. Anglo-Egyptians approved the book. He had himself a great gift for both music and painting; he was essentially exacting where any literature touching Egypt was concerned; but I am glad to think that, whatever he thought of the book as fiction, he did not find it necessary to grant absolution as to the facts and the details of incidents in character and life portrayed in *Donovan Pasha*. There is, however, in the House of Commons today a young and active politician once in the Egyptian service, and who bears a most striking resemblance to the purely imaginary portrait which Mr. Talbot Kelly, the artist, drew of the Dicky Donovan of the book. This young politician, with his experience in the diplomatic service, is in manner, disposition, capacity, and in his neat, fine, and alert physical frame, the very image of Dicky Donovan, as in my mind I perceived him; and when I first saw him I was almost thunderstruck, because he was to me Dicky Donovan come to life. There was nothing Dicky Donovan did or said or saw or heard which had not its counterpart in actual things in Egypt. The germ of most of the stories was got from things told me, or things that I saw, heard of, or experienced in Egypt itself. Suffice it to say that the story in the main was true. The Mahommed Seti of that story was the servant of a friend of mine, and he did in life what I made him do in the tale. The first of them were drawn from Australia and the Islands of the Southern Pacific, where I had lived and roamed in the middle and late Eighties. They appeared in various English magazines, and were written in London far from the scenes which suggested them. None of them were written on the spot, as it were. I did not think then, and I do not think now, that this was perilous to their truthfulness. After many years of travel and home-staying observation I have found that all worth remembrance, the salient things and scenes, emerge clearly out of myriad impressions, and become permanent in mind and memory. Things so emerging are typical at least, and probably true. Those tales of the Far South were given out with some prodigality. By accident, and on the suggestion of my friend Mr. The years went by, and, four times visiting Egypt, at last I began to write of her. That is now five years ago. From time to time the stories which I offer to the public in this volume were given forth.

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ghdzeeyeh, a dancing-woman of the Ghawazee tribe, of whom, in the phrase of the moralists, the less said the better. What her name was does not matter. She had a husband who played the kemengeh for her dancing. She had as good a house as the Omdah, and she had two female slaves. Dicky Donovan was of that rare type of man who has the keenest desire to know all things, good or evil, though he was fastidious when it came to doing them. He had a gift of keeping his own commandments. For, being absolutely without fear, he did what he listed and went where he listed. An insatiable curiosity was his strongest point, save one. If he had had a headacheâ€” though he never hadâ€”he would at once have made an inquiry into the various kinds of headache possible to mortal man, with pungent deductions from his demonstrations.

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