

IT CAME OUT OF EGYPT

— or Mummy Told Us That One Too,
by JOHN McDOUGALL

IN one of my daughter's Social Studies books is a reproduction of an ancient Egyptian painting. It depicts an Ancient Egyptian standing in what was apparently the favourite attitude of the times, i.e. sideways on. Like many other Ancient Egyptians, the man's face is vaguely reminiscent of the Jack of Spades in a pack of playing cards. Before him, hanging from a piece of string, he holds a fish.

At first, casual glance, this picture strikes no responsive chord. Calm, dispassionate, the man stands—staring at the dead, dangling fish. His face appears flat, expressionless. Even the dead fish seems to display more emotion.

Yet—look closer.

Look steadily, a few moments, at that solitary, forward-gazing, playing-card eye.

Slowly then, in the depth of the cold, printers' ink, comes the stir of life; a warmth appears on the flat, white surface of the paper. Steadily now, more plainly, the message comes—across the chasm of five thousand years. Ringing its unmistakable bell in the watcher's mind.

Clearly, the picture is speaking—the eye has a meaning, a look that is definite and plain.

It is a look that we, at Mount Maunganui, can place in a flash. From Spirits' Bay to south of Foveaux Strait, a hundred thousand more will do the same.

It is the smugly dogmatic, self-satisfied expression of the successful fisherman.

In this particular picture, the long-dead artist has confined himself to the one single human figure. But we know that the others are there. At the side—just out of sight. Half a dozen of them, all Ancient Egyptians, all standing sideways on, all looking at the fish.

Our Ancient Egyptian is telling them what bait he used—how, at the critical moment, he gave that quick, cunning little jerk at his line.

As we do here, at Mount Maunganui, fifty centuries later. As we do at St. Heliers, Lyall Bay and Waikouaiti.

I don't suppose there are any snapper in the Nile. It doesn't look like a snapper. Nor, for that matter, does it look like a kahawai, or a trevalli, or a terekahi. But the basic principle remains unchanged. On the Nile or at Ngahauranga, we all recognise the thing that the Ancient Egyptian is holding before him. It is a Good Eating Fish.

That we can place the Ancient Egyptian's fish so readily into its proper category is due, of course, to the fact that it is quite a small fish. All small fish are Good Eating Fish. After that come Big Ones and then Whoppers.

The ancient Egyptians are known to have reached a high standard of culture; yet, in spite of this, they had no comic books. Had the artist lived in more civilised times, there would, no doubt, have been a squarish sort of balloon coming from the Ancient Egyptian's mouth with the words (in hieroglyphics of course) "A Good Eating Fish."

Not that the thing would have stopped there. There would have been other balloons—a whole series of them, in fact. For our Ancient Egyptian so plainly has other things to say. One look at that eye will tell you that, almost certainly, he is being dogmatic about the most suitable type of bait.

Just as we are at Mount Maunganui when we go out after snapper. And probably with as little justification—bait

being one of the best subjects on which to be dogmatic.

You can almost hear him saying it. "Salted donkey. Ahmed. The only thing—a bit of well-salted donkey. Sticks on the hook. Gets 'em every time—"

We're like that at Mount Maunganui. Only we are dogmatic about the merits of octopus, or trevalli, or pickled swordfish. Each of these, and others besides, has its fanatical followers as being the only thing for snapper.

In point of fact, this matter of bait is perhaps the most pitiful of the fisherman's beliefs. Ludicrously easy as it is to disprove, this very fact seems to make him cling to it the tighter. A post-mortem on the stomach of the average snapper, for example, shows with embarrassing clarity that this fish has no preferences whatsoever. It is nothing more nor less than a marine vacuum cleaner. Moving steadily across the ocean bed, it simply engulfs all portable objects lying in its inexorable path. Bits of shell, strings of seaweed, whole crabs, lost dentures—anything. The reason that old door-knobs, lead sinkers, etc., are in the minority is that, on sea-beds, these articles are not particularly plentiful.



"The smugly dogmatic, self-satisfied expression of the successful fisherman"

Only last week, by way of example, I myself examined a specimen from my catch. He was a medium-sized snapper—definitely beyond the Good Eating class, in fact, almost thirteen inches long. The first deft surgical strokes of my bait knife revealed a stomach that bulged in a manner unseemly even in a deceased snapper. The cause of the almost obscene distension proved to be an entire, unmasticated sea-egg, complete with its thousands of sharp, up-standing spines. About the size of a regulation tennis ball, bristling like a badly-frightened hedgehog, this marine pin-cushion had apparently been swallowed alive, whole, and doubtless screaming, by its amazing fellow inhabitant of the depths.

As a matter of fact, the hedgehog analogy appears to be the only one that will serve. This snapper's gastronomic feat is roughly equal to the swallowing alive of a medium-sized, muscular hedgehog by an average fox terrier dog.

Yet these are the creatures which we picture as a race of finny epicures, fastidiously picking their way across the ocean bed, turning in finicky disdain from a succulent piece of carefully filleted trevalli, nosing in delicate scorn a tastily prepared segment of swordfish. The thought is one to make a catfish laugh.

However—back to our picture.

In the Ancient Egyptian's eye, there lurks yet another shade of meaning. It is fairly obvious that he, too, is a connoisseur of "possies." Next to the bait question, frequently superior to it, this marks the fisherman. Plainly, you can hear our Ancient Egyptian saying it.

"Only one possie, of course, Abou. At this time of day, anyway. Just by that big bend in the river—straight across from the tomb of Rameses III. Get the base of the pyramid of Tutankhamen in line with the left eyebrow of the Sphinx. Throw your line well out—a good chunk of salted donkey on the end. You'll get 'em every time!" A knowing little leer comes into the solitary, playing-card eye. Crafty, omniscient. "Only for three days each side of full moon, of course—or

(continued on next page)

(Solution to No. 842)

S	L	I	M	E	S	U	P	P	O	S	E
T	N	N	U	A	S	M					
R	O	U	N	D	E	L	A	Y	T	E	E
A	R	O	T	S	R	N					
I	C	E	C	R	E	A	M	K	I	N	D
T		S	N	R	C						
S	A	C	H	E	T	N	E	T	H	E	R
	A	D	C	L							
F	I	R	E	R	E	D	E	E	M	E	D
L	K	I	A	V	A	R					
E	L	I	N	O	S	T	A	L	G	I	A
S	N	C	E	N	I	F					
H	A	G	G	A	R	D	T	A	C	I	T

Clues Across

- Two degrees before fifty makes a scene of utter confusion (5).
- The Austin's built to endure (7).
- See 10 across (7).
- This disease is a silent afterthought (5).
- With 8 across, this describes Blake's mills (7).
- Man in tears, very much put out to find the bits left over (8).
- A baby one lets the parents out (6).
- What 22 across 20 down do not make, according to Richard Lovelace (6).
- What Perce does to Des here, but Perce is out of order (8).

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- One of a pair (4).
- "We carved not a line, and we raised not a —, But we left him alone with his glory" (Wolfe, "The Burial of Sir John Moore") (5).
- Such a push could make Sue limp (7).
- Called out in the shed (7).
- Unpleasant end of a line of kings (5).
- "Get thee to a ——" ("Hamlet," Act 3, Scene 1) (7).
- If reversed indeed, refusing to obey (6).
- Spots arranged to form upright supports (5).
- Proverbially, they have ears (5).
- Nips back (4).

No. 843 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

Clues Down

- Moreover, this would make Bess die (7).
- When bit, it's a case of being hoist with his own petard (5).
- Fast time (4).
- Fired (6).
- Many rise from this school (8).
- Five hundred salmon? Nuts! (7).
- They are usually made of straw or twigs, but also in the finest silk (5).
- Always in a hole, but showing deep respect (8).
- This vocal effect could be a lot more confused (7).

