



The Last Pasha: A Swiss Adventurer in Egypt, 1909-1911.: Letters from Otto Pluss.

Jacques Anthony Pluss

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In 1909, young Swiss architectural designer and apprentice engineer left his home in Aarau in search of both adventure and professional experience difficult to find at home. He ended up a short time later first in Cairo, Egypt, and next in the region of Luxor in Upper (southern) Egypt. He began to write detailed letters home. They explain that he encountered not only the experience he required but also a setting full of ancient Egyptian ruins and an Arab population not at all hostile to Otto. In fact, the locals dubbed him a "Pasha," or an equitable and decent Gentleman, when not all Europeans were. He also became a protege of the wealthy, elderly Baron Eugen von Pfiffer, a Swiss-German engineer who took young Otto as a surrogate son. Otto surely had adventures, riding up and down the Nile River on work assignments, on learning to grasp and appreciate Arab ways, and even to have a youthful romance with an older married European woman. And probably without realizing it until near the end of his two year long stay in Egypt, he actually found himself on the edges of an espionage situation between European expatriates while the seeds of World War One were being sown back in Europe. For Otto, however, Egypt was a beautiful land with a wonderful climate, starry nights, an absence of warlike conflicts, and youthful energy. He returned to Switzerland in 1911 only with reticence. He longed to return to Egypt at some point, but the situation of his successful life at home cut his plans short. He died prematurely and unfairly in 1935 in a mansion he purchased as a summer home for his wife and two children in his home town in 1935, surrounded by the photos, relics and collectibles he'd purchased years earlier in Egypt itself. Of course, that tells the reader where he truly wanted to see his last, and even now I easily imagine him strolling under acacia trees on the banks of the Nile River he loved. The author, Jacques Pluss, PhD. is one of Otto's two grandsons. Prior to the demise of Otto's only son, Dr. Jacques Miro Pluss, both Jacques the son and Jacques the grandson painstakingly reconstructed Otto's letters and memorabilia. Otto's story in Egypt should not be, and will not be, forgotten.

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