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A survey of Egyptian literature

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A. M.

-T H E S I S-

A SURVEY OF EGYPTIAN LITERATURE.

F R E D H . L A W T O N
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A Survey of Egyptian Literature.

Only in comparatively recent years have we had any very definite knowledge about the great civilization of the Egyptian people. For centuries, all that was known was found in the writings of Herodotus and a few other ancient writers of foreign nations, who had derived most of their information from hearsay and other unreliable sources. It was not until archaeologists began their labors on the field, and European scholars turned their attention to original sources of information, that the great significance of Egypt to the ancient world began to be understood. Though the Egyptians were ever an exclusive people, who took pains to conceal rather than display their knowledge, nevertheless we find abundant traces of their influence among those peoples who in any way came into contact with them. The Hebrews incorporated the learning of the Egyptians almost bodily; the Phoenecians disseminated it widely; the Greeks borrowed from it freely. Students of antiquity have long been dazzled with the brilliancy of Greece and the splendor of Rome, but the roots of civilization are certainly as worthy of scholarly interest as the blossom and foliage which are more readily apparent. Egypt did for ancient history what the middle age has done for our history. It attained a certain degree of civilization, which was arrested and

remained dormant for some time, but finally blossomed in the Alexandrian epoch, under the influence of the Hellenizing spirit, into one of the most brilliant periods in the history of humanity. It is something, then, for Egypt to have laid, as it has done, an important part of the foundation of civilization.

Nothing can give us so exact an idea of what the character of Egypt has been as a glance at its literature; for, by a study of its style, scope and content, we may obtain an insight into those qualities of mind and sense which so distinguish the Egyptians from other nations of antiquity. What people write about, is what they think about, and what people think, that they are. It is of practical interest, then, to know in what respects the literature of Egypt is peculiar or differentiates itself from other literatures. In the first place, we must keep in mind that this literature was indigenous, and entirely uninfluenced by other nations. It is a purely original development, which cannot be said of any other literature, with the possible exception of the Chinese. Perhaps we can better appreciate this fact when we consider the slow development of our own literature, which never had to undergo a formative process like that of Egypt, and had all the riches of the classics at its call.

To the isolation of Egypt we must attribute the fact that so much of her literature is of particular rather than general interest. The universal factor, of which we hear so much to-

day, was almost an unknown quantity in Egyptian literature. Another distinctive feature is that there is almost no development of power. In fact, many of the earliest literary fragments are the best. This distinction is in accordance with what we know of the Egyptians throughout their history, in all departments of knowledge. There were distinct outbursts of literary and artistic activity at various times, but the latter marked little or no advance on the former. Indeed for massive grandeur and sublimity, the monuments of the IVth dynasty have never been, and probably never will be, surpassed, and the earliest known sculpture is the best. We are then face to face with the remarkable fact that a chronological study of Egyptian literature, extending over a period of more than 3000 years, shows almost no development of literary style or power. Two examples, separated by about 3,000 years, may serve to illustrate somewhat inadequately the perpetuity of thought and style.

The first, taken from the Prisse Papyrus of "Proverbs", section 1, written about 4000 B. C., lays down some maxims concerning discretion in speech:-

"The cautious man succeeds; the accurate man is praised; to the man of silence the sleeping-chamber is opened. Wide scope hath he who is acquiescent in his speech; knives are set against him who forceth his way wrongfully".

This paragraph certainly suffers nothing in comparison with a paragraph on the same subject from the Maxims of Any, about 1000 B. C.:-

"Speak not overmuch, for men are deaf to him who maketh many words; but if thou art silent, thou art pleasing, therefore speak not. Above all be cautious in speech, for the ruin of a man is on his tongue. The body of a man is a storehouse which is full of all manner of answers. Wherefore choose thou the good, and speak good, while the evil remaineth shut up within thy body".

Egypt forms another interesting contrast to other nations in its literary development, in that its first literary manifestations are prose and not poetry. In almost every other literature, (except English, where prose and poetry grew together,) poetry is its first form. Whether we may draw any correct inferences from this difference is a matter of opinion, but to my mind it indicates the unimaginative and practical nature of the people, a suggestion which is further carried out by the ethical and proverbial character of the earliest literature. It is interesting to note that the earliest literary fragment extant, viz., the first part of the Prisse papyrus, from which I have just quoted, is a treatise on manners and behavior, differing very little in its teachings from our modern books of etiquette.

I have said advisedly that the Egyptians were unimaginative, for this statement runs counter to the opinion of many Egyptologists. M. Edward Naville finds in the religious writings of the Egyptians a wealth of Oriental imagination, but, to my mind he confuses imagination with mysticism. Rather

might we say that poverty of imagination among the Egyptians is covered up by the incomprehensibility of their mysticism. It is comparatively easy to mistake muddiness of thought for imaginative power. Only a little reading, however, is necessary to convince one that their wonderful "oriental imagination" only expresses itself in worn out figures and hackneyed similes in endless repetition. Much of this mysticism we find in all oriental literature, but it is particularly characteristic of Egyptian religious literature, possibly because the priests who did this writing wished to keep religion a mystery whose interpretation should be wholly in the hands of the priestly class.

A final distinctive characteristic of Egyptian literature, and the one which is the most apparent, is the peculiar form in which it is conveyed to us. It may seem strange to some people that a writing where pictures of animals, plants and human beings are found side by side could ever be adapted to literary uses, which, indeed, it could not, if these hieroglyphics were really the picture writing which they seem to be. Probably it was so originally, until the discovery was made that instead of using separate symbols indefinitely to represent separate ideas, writing could be greatly simplified by using symbols to represent the sounds used in spoken language, thus formulating a definite alphabet according to a phonetic system. This, of course, is the process through which every alphabet has gone, although the connection between the two kinds of writing is more apparent in the Egyptian than in the modern alphabets.

In fact the hieroglyphic writing never became purely alphabetic in the modern sense, but it was also confusedly pictorial and syllabic in character.

The discovery of the literary value of the Egyptian language is due to the wonderful, scholarly work of Champollion at the beginning of the 19th century, in deciphering the Rosetta stone, and using it as a key to unlock the mysteries of hieroglyphic writing, which up to that time had baffled the skill of all Egyptologists and philologists. Thanks to his genius, the possibility of adding to our Egyptian knowledge from original sources has been increased a thousandfold. New discoveries of inscriptions and papyri are annually increasing our store of information, although many papyri have been lost or destroyed before their value was recognized.

It may be well at this point to state the three forms of Egyptian writing and explain their uses:-

(1) The hieroglyphic proper is the picture writing already referred to, which is most generally known because it is used altogether on the monuments, and almost invariably in stone carving of every kind. When hieroglyphic was first used we do not know. We find many specimens from the 3d and 4th dynasties and know that it was used in the time of Mena, nearly 5000 B. C. For centuries it remained, almost without change, the most sacred writing, and was never wholly supplanted by the shorter forms until the 3d century of our era.

(2) The Hieratic is an abridged hieroglyphic, adapted for

writing on papyrus. The sacred writings were confined to these two. The development of the hieratic is likewise lost in antiquity. We know from existing papyri that it was in use long before Abraham came down into Egypt, 2,285 B. C. Naturally it is the medium in which nearly all Egyptian literature, strictly speaking, is written.

(3) The demotic, or enchorial, is an abridgement of the hieratic, which has lost almost all traces of its original pictorial character. It came into use during the reign of Psamtik in the 7th century B. C., and continued to be the popular method of writing until the 2nd century A. D., when it was gradually absorbed into the Coptic; that is, the Coptic alphabet was the result of a union of Greek and demotic characters, and being much simpler than demotic, the latter fell into disuse.

The hieratic is mainly a transliteration of the hieroglyphic into a running hand, and is closely allied to it in grammatical structure; the demotic, on the other hand, is the writing of the vulgar tongue, which was practically another language.

In this survey of Egyptian literature, two methods of presentation are open,- the chronological and the logical. It is usual in a history of literature to follow the former method, but the literature of Egypt, as already pointed out, is peculiar in its development or, rather, in its lack of development. It would seem that in amount of time, at least, no nation was ever given a better opportunity to attain literary perfection than

the Egyptians, and therefore, the fact that it made no appreciable advance in a period of 3000 years is all the more remarkable. For this reason the chronological method of studying Egyptian literature has little advantage except as one way of classification. Moreover, the fragments of Egyptian literature we possess are so few, and separated by so many centuries, that any inductions drawn from a chronological arrangement would be necessarily superficial. For these reasons, the logical classification, according to subject matter, is most suitable.

Religious Literature.

The whole thought and life of Egypt was so bound up in its religion, that we should naturally expect the religious literature of this nation to be the most prominent, as it surely is. The best known Egyptian writing from an archaeological point of view is the Book of the Dead, a funeral ritual of the Egyptian priests. It is not a single book made in a determined epoch, but a collection of hymns and fragments relative to the future life, whose different parts have been composed in different epochs. In spite of the mysticism so characteristic of all Egyptian religious literature, one finds in it a "morale" of great elevation, and religious beliefs worthy of admiration. The earliest copy extant is in the oldest form of hieratic writing and was found in the tomb of a queen of the 11th dynasty, the approximate date of which was 2500 B. C. Many of its chapters however must date back into remote antiquity. The

complete work contains about 175 chapters many of which were added as late as the 15th century B. C. In spite of its varied authorship, the work is homogeneous in character, being a collection of prayers which were to be recited by the soul after death. In these prayers and the rubrics attached to them, we find an account of the experiences of the soul on its journey to the halls of Osiris, where it is judged by Osiris and 42 assessors, each representing one of the 42 mortal sins of the Egyptians. If justified, the soul is sent to Aahlu, the abode of the blessed. The book, or fragments of it, were placed in the coffin of the deceased, and it is for this reason that we have recovered so many remains of the work. Only a few chapters can be said to have a real literary value from the modern point of view. The most interesting chapter is the one which has for its scene the judgment hall of Osiris. In this chapter occurs the so-called Negative Confession, in which the soul addresses successively 42 gods sitting in judgment over the 42 mortal sins. To each god the soul makes denial of having committed one of these prescribed sins, in the following manner:-

(1) "Hail, thou whose strides are long, who comest forth from Annu. (Heliopolis) I have not done iniquity.

(2) Hail, thou who art embraced by flame, who comest forth from Kher-aba, I have not robbed with violence".

Leaving out the salutations I will give the 40 remaining confessions as translated by Dr. Budge.

- (3) "I have not done violence to any man.
- (4) I have not committed theft.
- (5) I have not slain man or woman.
- (6) I have not made light the bushel.
- (7) " " " acted deceitfully.
- (8) " " " purloined the things which belong to God.
- (9) " " " uttered falsehood.
- (10) " " " carried away food.
- (11) " " " uttered evil words.
- (12) " " " attacked any man.
- (13) " " " killed the beasts (which are the property of God).
- (14) " " " acted deceitfully.
- (15) " " " laid waste the lands which have been ploughed.
- (16) " " never pried into matters (to make mischief).
- (17) " " not set my mouth in motion (against any man).
- (18) " " " given way to wrath concerning myself without a
cause.
- (19) " " " defiled the wife of any man.
- (20) " " " committed any sin against purity.
- (21) " " " struck fear (into any man).
- (22) " " " encroached upon (sacred times and seasons).
- (23) " " " been a man of anger.
- (24) " " " made myself deaf to the words of right and truth.
- (25) " " " stirred up strife.
- (26) " " made no man to weep.
- (27) " " not committed acts of impurity, neither have I lain

with men.

(28) I have not eaten my heart (i.e. lost my temper).

(29) " " abused (no man).

(30) " " not acted with violence.

(31) " " " judged hastily.

(32) " " ", and I have not taken vengeance upon the
god.

(33) " " " multiplied (my) speech overmuch.

(34) " " " acted with deceit, and I have not worked
wickedness.

(35) " " " uttered curses (on the king).

(36) " " " fouled (?) water.

(37) " " " made haughty my voice.

(38) " " " cursed the god.

(39) " " " behaved with insolence.

(40) " " " sought for distinctions.

(41) " " " increased my wealth, except such things as are
justly mine own possessions.

(42) " " " thought scorn of the god who is in my city".

It is very evident from the above confessions that the ethical standard of the ancient Egyptians was very high, but although theoretically perfect, we know from other sources that in practice they were morally lax. That they were so detracts nothing from the moral elevation of these confessions, which remind one forcibly of the laws and commandments of the Hebrews, and suggest that Moses may have been indebted to Egypt in

formulating his code of law.

The Book of the Dead is in its form and make up an early contribution to dramatic literature. It is all written in the first person, and broken up into numerous scenes, indicated by the rubrics and beautifully illuminated vignettes which accompany it. To make the comparison to modern dramatic literature more complete, we may say that the rubric gives us the stage directions and the vignette the stage setting.

The selected passages which I have quoted from the Book of the Dead are not to be considered as representative of the work as a whole, for the chapter from which they are taken is the only chapter which lays any stress on morals. The great teaching of the Ritual is of course the immortality of the soul, and a future state of misery or happiness according to the worth of the soul when weighed in the balance against the symbol of "Truth".

The following passage is taken from the scene of the weighing of the heart of the dead. In this instance, as in numerous others, the soul is identified with the god Osiris:-

"Thoth, the judge of Right and Truth, of the great company of the gods who are in the presence of Osiris, saith:- Hear ye this judgment. The heart of Osiris hath in very truth been weighed, and his soul hath stood as a witness for him; it hath been found true by trial in the Great Balance. There hath not been found any wickedness in him; he hath not wasted the offerings in the temples; he hath not done harm by his deeds; and he

hath entered no evil reports while he was upon earth".

The majority of the chapters are mystical prayers to the deities for help and assistance in the various vicissitudes of the soul-journey after death. There are also some devotional hymns which possess literary merit. Their style reminds one forcibly of the Hebrew psalmists, and they abound in lofty and beautiful sentiments. I select from Budge's translation a portion of a hymn to Osiris which gives a fair idea of the poetic style.

"I am Thoth, the perfect scribe, whose hands are pure. I am the lord of purity, the destroyer of evil, the scribe of right and truth, and that which I abominate is sin. Behold me, for I am the writing reed of the god Neb-er-tcher, the lord of laws, who giveth forth the word of wisdom and understanding, and whose speech hath dominion over the two lands. I am Thoth, the lord of right and truth, who maketh the feeble one to gain the victory, and who avengeth the wretched and the oppressed on him that wrongeth him. I have scattered the darkness; I have driven away the storm, and I have brought the wind to Un-nefer, the beautiful breeze of the north wind, even as it came forth from the womb of his mother".

The following hymn to Amen is translated by Mr. C. W. Goodwin from a papyrus in the British Museum of about the 19th dynasty. In this hymn, Amen, Horus and Tum are all identified with the Sun which the Egyptians considered the Supreme Being.

"Come to me, O thou Sun; Horus of the horizon give me

(help).

Thou art he that giveth (help); there is no help without thee, except thou (givest it).

Come to me Tum; hear me thou great god.

My heart goeth forth towards An; let my desires be fulfilled.

Let my heart be joyful, my inmost heart in gladness.

Hear my vows; my humble supplications every day; my adorations by night;

My cries of terror.....prevailing in my mouth, which come from my mouth one by one.

Oh! Horus of the horizon, there is no other besides like him.

Protector of millions, deliverer of hundreds of thousands.

The defender of him that calls to him, the lord of An.

Reproach me not with my sins; I am a youth weak of body.

I am a man without heart. Anxiety comes upon me as an ox upon grass.

If I pass the night in (joy?) and I find refreshment, anxiety returns to me in the time of lying down."

That this hymn possesses all the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, particularly the parallelisms which are so distinctive, needs hardly to be pointed out. It is only necessary to substitute the words Jehovah, Jerusalem, Lord of Israel, etc., for the Egyptian names to make the likeness complete. When we consider the long sojourn of Israel in Egypt, and that some of the Hebrew psalms are ascribed to Moses, who was educated at the

Egyptian court, we can no longer be in doubt as to the origin of the Hebrew form of poetry.

There are many other hymns which are extremely interesting for their theological teaching, but as it is necessary to leave the consideration of religious literature, I will quote only one, which, as Dr. Budge has shown, is fairly comparable in its theism to the teaching of the Hebrew scriptures.

"God is One and Alone, and there is none other with him.

God is the One, the One who has made all things.

God is a Spirit, a hidden Spirit, the Spirit of Spirits, the great Spirit of Egypt, the divine Spirit.

God is from the beginning, and has existed from the beginning.

He is the primeval One, and existed when as yet nothing existed; He existed when as yet there was nothing, and whatever is, He made it after He was. He is the Father of beginnings. God is eternal, He is everlasting and without end, Perpetual, Eternal. He has endured for endless time, and will exist henceforward, forever.

God is hidden, and no one hath perceived his form, no one hath fathomed His likeness, He is hidden in respect of gods and men, and is a mystery to His creatures. God is the Truth, He lives by Truth, He lives upon Truth, He is the King of Truth.

God is Life, and man lives through Him alone.

He blows the breath of Life into their nostrils.

God is Father and Mother: The Father of fathers and the
Mother of mothers.

God begets, but he is not begotten, he gives birth to,
but is not given birth to.

He begets Himself, and gives birth to Himself, He makes,
but is not made, He is the creator of His own form,
and Fashioner of this body. God is the creator of
heaven and earth, the deep, the water and the
mountains. God stretches out the heavens, and makes
firm the earth beneath.

That which emanates from (i.e., the desire of) His heart is
performed immediately, and when he has once spoken it
actually comes to pass and endures forever and ever.

God is the father of the gods, and the progenitor of all
deities.

God is compassionate to those that fear Him, and hears
those who cry unto Him. He protects the weak
against the strong, God knows those who know Him, He
rewards those who serve Him, and protects those who
follow Him".

This and other passages from Egyptian writings show us that
some of the Egyptians, at least, had a more fundamental con-
ception of divinity than the prevailing polytheism would seem
to indicate. Just what the status of Egyptian religion was, is
as yet an unsettled question, and it is to be hoped that the

decipherment of new inscriptions and papyri will throw more light on this much mooted and extremely complicated question.

Ethical Literature.

The moral teaching of the Egyptians differs in no important respect from the ethics of the 20th century. It was embodied in three great moral duties, -piety to the gods, charity to men and veneration of deceased ancestors. These duties find expression in several Moral Treatises written at scattered intervals from the earliest to the latest times, and it is from these treatises that we get the best notion of Egyptian social conditions, at least, theoretically. Most of these treatises are in the form of disjointed proverbs written in the figurative style common to proverbs at all ages. Moral teachings are also found in the form of a story, poem or letter written by a teacher to his pupil, but probably intended for general circulation. The Negative Confession from which I have quoted is of course a fine example of Egyptian ethical teaching.

The following proverbs from the Prisse Papyrus are believed to date from the 4th dynasty.

"If thou sittest (at meat) with a company, hate the bread that thou desirest- it is a little moment. Restrain appetite; gluttony is base. A cup of water, it quenbeth the thirst; a mouthful of melon, it stayeth the appetite".

This excellent advice is tempered by a bit of philosophy:-

"Be not afraid of meat in company with the greedy; take

(Transl. by F. L. C. Griffith.)

what he giveth thee; refuse it not, for it will humor him".

In consideration of the uncertainties of existence we are told to,—"Beware of haughtiness; one knoweth not what shall happen, what a god will do when he striketh".

Another collection of proverbs in the Prisse Papyrus, known as the proverbs of Ptah-hetep, date from the 5th dynasty. A few examples will suffice to show that they compare favorably with more modern ones.

"Let not thy heart be great because of thy knowledge; converse with the ignorant as with the learned; the boundary of skill is not attainable".

"Let not thy mouth be filled at thy neighbor's table".

"A man liveth long whose rule is justice..... He maketh property thereby, while a covetous man hath no house."

"Greater is prayer to a kindly person than force".

"A little for which there hath been extortion maketh remorse when the blood is cool."

"He who enjoyeth himself all day long, doth not provide his house".

"Love is good, but twice good is it for a son to hearken to his father."

"If virtue entereth, vice departeth".

As has already been pointed out, these early maxims are as good as any which appear in the next 3000 years, and are fair samples of Egyptian ethical teaching at all periods. One poem, dating from the 19th dynasty, written to a dissipated student,

is an excellent bit of description.

The following English translation by Griffith is from the German of Adolf Erman.

"They tell me that thou forsakest books
And givest thyself to pleasure.
Thou goest from street to street
Every evening the smell of beer
The smell of beer, frightens people away from thee
It bringeth thy soul to ruin.

Thou art like a broken helm
That obeyeth on neither side.
Thou art as a shrine without its god;
As a house without bread.

Thou art met climbing the walls
And breaking through the paling
People flee from thee,
Thou strikest them until they are wounded.

Oh! that thou didst know that wine is an abomination
And that thou wouldst forswear the Sheden drink.
That thou wouldst not put cool drinks within thy heart
That thou wouldst forget the Teurehu
But now thou art taught
To sing to the flute
To recite (?) to the pipe
To intone to the lyre
To sing to the harp.

(and generally to lead a life of dissipation).

In spite of the Negative Confession, I am inclined to believe that ethics and theology were not very closely associated among the Egyptians. Although the ethical teachers were priests, morality does not seem to have been so much a requisite to the salvation of the soul as a knowledge of theology, or, at least, a correct belief. While the proverbs of Solomon are distinctly spiritual and religious, the proverbs of the Egyptians are rather social and moral. Otherwise the Hebrew and Egyptian proverbs are very much alike in style and teaching. In fact, they both contain the obvious moral teachings which are common to all ages and all classes of society. If Egyptian proverbs are not particularly subtle or refined, they have, at least, a frankness and straightforwardness which is in happy contrast to the veiled cynicism of much modern philosophy.

-Historical Literature-

Up to the present time no connected historical literary remains have been found in Egypt. That Egypt must have had her historians we can hardly doubt, for if, as Herodotus tells us, the Egyptians were very proud of their antiquity, and revered their ancestors, surely they must have had some record of their past achievements. Manetho must, also, have had recourse to some historical documents in the preparation of his list of Egyptian rulers. Possibly the future will reveal to us some historical work now long buried from sight which will compare

with the works of Herodotus and the Hebrew historians. At present, the only fragments of historical literature recovered are a few stelae and inscriptions on the walls of tombs and temples, commemorating the exploits of kings, usually written in a pompous, eulogistic style. One of these stelae, set up by the king Piankhy (about 800 B. C.), in commemoration of his successful war against the princes of the North Land, possesses considerable literary merit. The style is much like that of the Hebrew chroniclers. The following excerpt is Piankhy's speech to his army when he sends them away to battle, and their reply to him. He tells them to pay homage to Amen at Karnak, and to put their trust in him.

x "When ye reach Thebes the approach to Apt-esut, # enter ye into the water, wash ye in the river, dress on the bank of the stream, unstring the bow, loosen the arrow. Let no chief boast as possessing might, there being no strength to the mighty if he regard him (Amen) not. He maketh the feeble-handed into the strong-handed; a multitude may turn their backs before the few; one may conquer a thousand. Sprinkle yourselves with the water of his altars; kiss ye the ground before his face; say ye to him, 'Give unto us a way that we may fight in the shadow of thy strong arm. The band that thou ledest, it cometh to pass that it overthroweth that which hath overthrown many'."

"Then they cast themselves on their faces before his Majesty, (saying) 'It is thy name that giveth us strength of arm, thy wisdom is the mooring-post of thy soldiers; thy bread

is in our bellies on every road; thy beer quencheth our thirst; it is thy valor that giveth us strength of arm; one is fortified at the remembrance of thy name, while the host is lacking whose captain is a vile coward. Who is like unto thee in these things? Thou art a mighty king that worketh with thy hands, master of the art of war!' "

Many of these historical inscriptions are in poetical form, and a few are even worthy to be called epics. Of these there is one notable example written on the exterior wall of the great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. It is a poetic story of the campaigns of Rameses II against the Hittites, in which he was particularly distinguished. This poem, composed by a scribe named Pentaour, enjoyed a great reputation, because several temples have preserved fragments of it. Happily, also, one papyrus in the London Museum contains the complete text. There are several other literary fragments concerning this same incident which are of more historical value, but none are so interesting from a literary point of view as this. The length of the document forbids a full quotation, but a few extracts will serve to show the style and power of the composition. Rameses is in march against Kadesh where an immense army of enemies is assembled. For some reason Rameses becomes cut off from his followers and is surrounded by a large number of the enemy.

#"He was alone by himself,- there was no other with him in this sortie. His Majesty looked behind him and saw that he was intercepted by two thousand five hundred horsemen in the way he

had to go, by all the fleetest men of the prince of the base Hittites, and of many lands, which were with him. There were three men to each chariot, but there were neither captains nor squires, nor leaders of bowmen nor skirmishers (with the king). Then said his majesty, 'Where art thou now my father Amen? Behold, does his father forget his son? But do I confide in my own strength? Walking or standing, is not my face toward thee?.... Do I not seek for thy mighty counsels, O thou great lord of Egypt, at whose approach the oppressors of the land are scattered? Have I not made for thee many and great buildings of stone? Have I not filled thy temple with my spoils, building for thee a temple to last myriads of years?..... I have built thee a house of great stones, erecting for thee eternal groves. I have brought for thee obelisks from Abou (Elephantine). I have caused the everlasting stones to be fetched..... When was it ever before said that such a thing was done? Confounded is every one that resists thy designs; blessed is every one who obeys thee, O Amen! That which thou doest is dear to my heart (?). I cry to thee my father Amen. I am in the midst of many unknown people gathered together from all lands. But I am alone by myself. There is none other with me. My bowmen and my horsemen have forsaken me; they were afraid; not one of them listened when I cried to them. Amen is more helpful to me than myriads of bowmen, than millions of horsemen, than tens of thousands of chosen youths, though they be all gathered together in one place. The arts of men prevail not. Amen is

more powerful than they; they follow not the commands of thy mouth,
O sun! Have I not sought out thy commands? Have I not invoked thee from the ends of the earth?' "

It is needless to say that this prayer is answered and Rameses, in a wonderful charge, puts the enemy entirely to rout. This is certainly poetry worthy of the name, and the whole poem shows that the scribe Pentaour was not lacking in inspiration or art. The above extract is only a very short fragment of this great heroic poem, which was written at least 600 years before the age of Homer.

Other interesting biographical as well as historical documents have been translated, such as the Inscription of Una dating from the VIth dynasty, but the limits of this paper forbid further mention.

-Fiction-

Another large and extremely interesting class of Egyptian literature is comprised of works of fiction in the form of short tales and fables about men and animals. These stories are not only interesting as showing the manners and customs of the times, but they have a permanent interest as fiction. Though they cannot be called fairy-tales, they deal largely with supernatural events, and might be compared to modern folk-tales. Animals have the gift of speech and men can transform themselves at will. Many tales suggest those of the Arabian Nights. Prof. Flinders Petrie has edited a number of these stories in two

volumes,# so that they are now easily accessible to all readers, and any extended quotation is unnecessary in this paper. One of the best known of these romances is the "Tale of the Two Brothers", evidently written during the XIXth dynasty, but probably containing parts much older. A summary of the tale would give no idea of its charm, but the opening paragraphs will suffice to show the simplicity and beauty of the style.

x"Once there were two brethren of one mother and one father; Anpu was the name of the elder, and Bata was the name of the younger. Now as for Anpu, he had a house and he had a wife. But his little brother was to him, as it were, a son. He it was who made for him his clothes; he it was who followed him behind his oxen to the fields; he it was who did the ploughing; he it was who harvested the corn; he it was who did for him all the matters that were in the field. Behold his younger brother grew to be an excellent worker, there was not his equal in the whole land".

One day when Anpu and Bata were in the fields working, Bata was sent to the house for a bag of grain. While there, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife was duplicated by Bata and Anpu's wife, with the result that Bata was falsely accused to Anpu, who resolved to kill him. The story goes on to say:-

"And the elder brother became as a panther of the south; he sharpened his knife; he took it in his hand; he stood behind the door of his stable to slay his younger brother as he came

in the evening to bring his cattle into the stable.

"Now the sun went down and he (Bata) loaded himself with herbs in his daily manner. He came and his foremost cow entered the stable and she said to her keeper, 'Behold thou thy elder brother standing before thee with his knife to slay thee; flee from before him'. He heard what his first cow said; and the next entering said likewise. He looked beneath the door of the stable; he saw the feet of his elder brother; he was standing behind the door, and his knife was in his hand. He cast down his load to the ground, and betook himself to flee swiftly; and his elder brother pursued after him with his knife. Then the younger brother cried out unto Ra Hanakhti, saying, 'My good lord! Thou art he that divides the evil from the good'. And Ra stood and heard his cry; and Ra made a wide water between him and his elder brother, and it was full of crocodiles".

With this protection the younger brother tells the older one the truth, and leaves for a far country, whereat Anpu kills his wife and mourns for his brother to whom he is at last united, when his brother, after a series of adventures, has become king of Egypt. Some of the best known Egyptian stories, dating from the earliest to the latest times are, "The Shipwrecked Sailor", "The Story of Sanehat", "The Doomed Prince", and "The Story of Setna", all of which may be found in the "Egyptian Tales" of Prof. Petrie. Such tales as these have always been popular among primitive peoples, and have not wholly lost their charm for us, as indicated by the popularity of our

"Jungle Books" and similar kinds of literature.

Another kind of fiction which I believe has never been given due prominence, is the beast fable which originated in Egypt and spread to other lands. That the fables of Aesop are of Egyptian origin has long been recognized, but it is not so well known that the Latin Physiologus, which exercised so much influence on the art and literature of the middle age, had its origin in Alexandria, and many of its fabulous accounts of animals, (notably the story of the phoenix), are of Egyptian origin.

The Egyptians were great believers in magic, and there are abundant specimens of magical literature, which, however, possess little or no literary value. Their interest is mainly philological. These magical treatises contained all manner of exorcisims and incantations, usually directed against diseases and evil spirits.

Some medical treatises have also come down to us, but those which have been translated do not come up to the standard of medical knowledge which the Egyptians must have possessed. We know from Herodotus that the Egyptian physicians were specialists who were not allowed to practise beyond the limits of their specialty. We also know from contemporaneous records that Egyptian physicians were very much in demand, and held in high esteem, by other nations. An examination of the medical literature we have, however, shows a great deterioration from the earliest to the latest times. We know that the science of medicine was understood and practised in the time of Mena,

(4,777 B. C.), a fact which seems almost incredible. Medical science was at least so far advanced in his day that his successor is reputed to have written a work on anatomy, and we have a treatise on the curing of fever ascribed to King Sent of the 2nd dynasty. In this treatise we find a distinct anatomical theory outlined, and a diagnosis of the fever in question which is remarkable for its particularity of detail. Some of the symptoms are as follows:-

"He feels indigestion, the mouth of his stomach (os ventriculi) is sick, his heart is burning, his clothes are heavy on him, many clothes will not warm him; the taste of his stomach is like that of a man who has eaten sycamore figs; he is in a very costive condition; and if he gets up, he is like a man prevented from walking".

The last sentence illustrates the round-a-bout and figurative style with which the Egyptians clothed the most ordinary and common-place statements. It is readily seen that this early medical treatise is very modern in its scientific methods, but as we advance in time we find more and more magic creeping in and less and less sense, until the latest medical books are nothing more or less than books of magic filled with incantations against disease. Nothing points any more strongly to the decay of Egyptian culture and learning than a perusal of its medical literature.

As for the more exact sciences, we again find no literary remains to compare with the knowledge which the Egyptians very

(# Transl. by J. P. Mahaffy.)

obviously possessed. The Great Pyramid alone is an eternal witness to their practical knowledge of mathematics, engineering and even astronomy. Except for a treatise on Geometry, Egyptian scientific literature is an unknown quantity. A sentence from the Great Harris papyrus, however, may give us a hint as to the advanced stage of astronomical knowledge in Egypt. In this 19th dynasty document we read that "Ptah.....moulded man, created the gods, made the sky, and formed the earth, revolving in space", and we are also told in an inscription of the Pyramid Period that "the earth navigates the celestial ocean in like manner with the sun and stars". It must be admitted that these are very remarkable expressions for so early an age.

Numerous letters on diversified subjects exist, some evidently intended for general circulation, which possess varying literary value. One interesting series of letters is found in a collection made by the poet Pentaour. He gives us ten letters from the pen of his master, Amen-cm-an, written in a chiding, fatherly manner concerning the scribe's youthful indiscretions and neglect of literature. Following is an example:-

"Faint-hearted one, exhortation is thrown away upon thee. Thou seest a great subject, yet dost not seize it; a story greater than any thou hast told. I give thee a hundred urgings, and thou neglectest them all. Thou art worse than an ass; urge him, and he is active for the day. Thou art worse than the negro; threaten him and he will carry his load..... I would

make a man of thee, thou bad youth! Do thou consider this".

It is not necessary to quote from judicial documents, lists and accounts, which possess no literary value; but with their mention we have touched upon every important branch of Egyptian literature come down to us. In conclusion, some general remarks seem necessary, gathering up the characteristics of this great literature as a whole. Compared with the literatures of Greece and Rome, it is, of course, disappointing; but as already pointed out, Egyptian literature is an original development, which, so far as we know, inherited nothing, was influenced by nothing. Its beginnings were auspicious, but for some reason it never got beyond the chrysalis stage, and its later developments do not fulfil its early promise. There are some brilliant passages, but they are almost obscured by the mass of ordinary and valueless dross. The wheat has to be gleaned from the chaff. The Egyptians were not at all artistic in their literary style; they seem to have had absolutely no sense of subordination of part to part, but all their thoughts are expressed coordinately regardless of value. The gems are uncut and unset, while a little polish and arrangement would have greatly enhanced their lustre. Every indication points to the conclusion that the science of rhetoric was little developed or appreciated. There seems to be no conscious striving after literary perfection of form and style which we find so fully developed among the Greeks, but a slavish following of old models. Egyptian literature is therefore naive and unconscious in the extreme,

wherever there is any attempt at originality, and in some cases, as in the tales, this extreme simplicity constitutes its chief charm. The noblest specimens of poetry are those where the conceptions are so great that the poet unconsciously reproduces the grandeur of the conception; but we find no examples of the elevation of a humble thought to a high aesthetic plane. Although we cannot claim for Egyptian writings great literary value, Egyptian literature is none the less interesting as a study of a prolonged, isolated development of literature in its primitive form.