ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians

Poems, Narratives, and Manuals of Instruction from the Third and Second Millenia B.C.

Adolf Erman

Translated by Aylward M. Blackman

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Originally published in 1927, this text contains a translation of Adolf Erman's work into English. Erman's original intention was to bring the songs, stories and poems that have survived from ancient Egypt to the masses of the modern world. The literature of the Egyptian world provides a real insight into the day-to-day life of one of the oldest societies known to man and Blackman's translation ensures that these insights are afforded to an English audience. This title will be of interest to students of History, Classics and Literature.

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THE LITERATURE OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS

POEMS, NARRATIVES, AND MANUALS OF INSTRUCTION, FROM THE THIRD AND SECOND MILLENNIA B.C.

BY

ADOLF ERMAN

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY

AYLWARD M. BLACKMAN

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

WHEN I undertook to prepare the English edition of Professor Erman's *Die Literatur der Aegypter*, I intended to carry out my task in the manner indicated in my review of the book in the *Journal of Egyptian Archæology*, vol. x. pp. 193 ff. This meant that a fuller use was to be made of Dr. Gardiner's *Notes on the Story of Sinuhe*, that full advantage was to be taken of that scholar's brilliant translation of the *Complaints of the Peasant*, recently published in the *Journal of Egyptian Archæology*, vol. ix. pp. 5 ff., and that various corrections, many of them noted in my review, were to be made in the translations of other texts. Shortly after I had begun the work, I received a letter from Professor Erman urgently requesting me not to make any alterations in his translations, or, if I felt compelled to do so, to content myself with inserting them in footnotes. In deference to his wishes I abandoned my original project, but at the same time decided that the suggestion with regard to footnotes was not feasible, for I realized that if I adopted it, they would in many instances occupy more than half the page. This would have been not only most disfiguring to the book, but highly distracting to the reader.

I felt it to be imperative, however, that the English renderings of the Egyptian texts appearing in this volume should not be merely translations of translations. They have, accordingly, in every instance been made directly from the Egyptian, though strictly in accordance with Professor Erman's interpretation, as set forth in his own German translations. Only on the very rarest occasions have I ventured to diverge from

his interpretation of a passage or rendering of a word, and then solely on the strength of statements, almost indisputably correct, to be found in Battiscombe Gunn's *Studies in Egyptian Syntax*, or in philological articles by Dr. Gardiner and other authorities—all of which have appeared since Professor Erman's book was published.

I should now like to take this opportunity of thanking Professor Erman for the great pleasure I have derived from translating this delightful book of his. I hope he will regard my undertaking as a tribute from one of the younger Egyptologists to the great scholar, who inaugurated those exhaustive and systematic researches, which, during the last thirty years, have so vastly increased our knowledge of Egyptian grammar and syntax, and of Egyptian philology as a whole.

When this book was already in print, an interesting article by Battiscombe Gunn on King Snefru appeared in the *Journal of Egyptian Archæology*, vol. xii. pp. 250 f.; it ought certainly to be read in connexion with the narratives and other compositions appearing on pp. 38 ff., 67, and 112 ff.

AYLWARD M. BLACKMAN

OXFORD, 1927

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

MY object in writing this book has been to make accessible to lovers of Antiquity the extensive remains of Egyptian literature which have been brought to light by the labours of Egyptologists. Most of this material has hitherto been known to none but a very limited circle of specialists, as it has been published in books and periodicals that are only available to a few. Yet this literature deserves to be known, not only because it is the oldest secular literature that has grown up in the world, but because it affords us an insight into an active, intellectual life, and into a poetry, which may well hold place beside the achievements of the Egyptians in the artistic and technical spheres. In any case, no one, if he is not acquainted with their literature, ought to pass judgment on the Egyptians and on the period in human development to which they belong.

I planned this book many years ago, and did a great deal of preliminary work for it; but it was not until I began seriously to carry out my project that I realized upon what a hazardous undertaking I had embarked. I have stated below (p. xlii) what the position is with regard to our translations. A great deal is still entirely unintelligible to us; and though, indeed, we know the approximate meaning of other passages, yet the exact significance of the words still escapes us, or the relationship of the sentences remains doubtful. In such cases one would prefer to give up all attempts at translating.

Still, if we would wait until all this uncertainty were removed, we should have to wait a long time—in the case of many texts this will never happen—and in the long run it is

really more important that the whole should be made accessible together, than that every subsidiary detail and every individual sentence should be rendered with absolute accuracy.

At the same time a translator should, of course, retail to the reader nothing as certain that is not so. I have tried to attain this object by the omission of what is unintelligible, by special type where there is uncertainty, and by a liberal use of notes of interrogation. On the other hand, I have had to resist the desire to give my reasons for the choice of any particular translation in cases of doubt, and to enter into other scientific discussions. For—and I should like expressly to emphasize this—I have not written this book for the limited circle of Egyptologists,[1] but for the many who are interested in the ancient world, yet to whom admittance to the field of Egyptian literature has hitherto been denied. I must request them, however, not to make a wrong use of the book, nor to wish to infer from it more than it is in a position to give. It sets out to acquaint the reader with the texts as a whole, and so I would ask the student, who is desirous of investigating particular points, to consult also the works of those Egyptologists to which I have referred in dealing with each individual composition. I have, as a rule, only mentioned two of my predecessors, the one who first recognized the content of the text, and the one whose work thereon is at present to be regarded as the best and most exhaustive. From them can be seen all that is satisfactory and unsatisfactory in what has previously been written about the texts in question, and what other translations have been proposed for particular passages. Many of these texts have been edited as much as sixty years ago, and a full understanding of them has only been arrived at gradually—from the first gropings and guesses to a grammatical elucidation, and from that again to an appreciation of the style. The

[1] Most of my fellow-specialists may well experience the same sensation as I did: they will be astonished at the great number of literary texts which have already been got together. Also an Egyptian work affects one quite differently, when read as a whole, than when, as is customary with us, it is laboriously translated sentence for sentence.

scholars who have devoted themselves to this problem are not few, and if I mention here the names of Chabas, Dévaud, Gardiner, Golénischeff, Goodwin, Griffith, Lange, Maspero, W. Max Müller, de Rougé, and Vogelsang, the list is not by any means complete. I myself also have participated in this opening up of the literary texts, more indeed than is to be seen from my printed works. It was my task to prepare most of these writings for the *Lexicon* which the German Universities have in hand, and it was my privilege, moreover, to expound them for a period of more than forty years in my lectures. That in these lectures I was not always the giver, but also obtained many good ideas from my pupils, is to be taken for granted, although I can no longer give a detailed acknowledgment of them. But all these pupils have my thanks now as I write this, and especially those four of our company, to whom this book is dedicated, and whom my thanks can no longer reach.

I could have greatly extended the scope of my book. I could also have included the demotic writings of the Græco-Roman epoch; but they assuredly belong to another world, and so I have preferred to call a halt at the end of the late New Kingdom, where, moreover, the great break occurs in the life of the Egyptian people. It will be better to form a separate collection of the demotic literary texts. The same holds good for the medical and mathematical works; both indeed belong, as is now even more evident, to the great achievements of the Egyptians, but they demand a special kind of treatment, and accordingly a book to themselves. From the endless multitude of religious texts I have taken only isolated examples, less on account of their contents than with a view to giving the reader an idea of their form.[1] I have acted also with similar restraint towards the innumerable inscriptions, even when they are couched in poetic language; for it was my business

[1] The student desiring more of them will find good translations in ROEDER, *Urkunden zur Religion des alten Ägyptens*, Jena, 1915; EDV. LEHMANN, *Textbuch zur Religionsgeschichte*, Leipzig, 1912 (translated by Grapow); SCHARFF, *Ägyptische Sonnenlieder*, Berlin, 1920.

to see that the remains of the actual literature were not hidden by what is unessential.[1]

I should like to have spared the reader the explanatory and introductory notes, and have permitted the Egyptians to speak for themselves; but the world into which I am leading him is so peculiar, that he would not be able to find his way about in it entirely unaided, and still less would he notice the niceties which an Egyptian author is so fond of inserting into his work. However, I have in these respects limited myself as far as possible, and in particular I have not gone more deeply into the questions of the religion, history, and geography than was necessary for the proper understanding of the passages concerned.

A translation is always an unsatisfactory thing, and no one has ever yet succeeded in bringing out the external features of the foreign original, and at the same time producing an intelligible translation of its contents in straightforward language. I have endeavoured not to deviate too far from the Egyptian text, although I have often allowed myself to stress the relationship of the sentences with one another, and have, where it could safely be done, interpolated particles which denote this relationship in our languages. On the other hand, I would often have liked to make the arrangement of words and sentences conform more closely to our own, but I could not do this if I wished to avoid concealing the indications of versification (see below p. xxxi, note 2).

With regard to titles and all kinds of technical terms, I have often had to content myself with inexact translations, and always so in the case of those antiquated names of peoples and countries, which the Egyptians preserved from the earliest period of their history, and which they themselves employed quite vaguely. Accordingly, when Nubian, negro, Asiatic, Bedouin, Palestine, or Syria are encountered in my translation, it would be well, before too much is inferred therefrom, to

[1] I have therefore also in the case of the actual literary texts not accepted every unimportant or meaningless fragment.

examine the original so as to see which of these ominous words is used there. A serious difficulty is presented also by the names of persons, gods, and Egyptian localities, of which we only know the consonants. To make them pronounceable I have merely adopted the customary practice of the present day. Where, however, there exists any tradition, or even just a generally recognized usage, in the rendering of a name, I have naturally availed myself of it. The reader must not, therefore, be surprised if side by side with monstrous forms such as Khekheperre-sonbu, are to be found Græcized forms such as Amenōphis, or pure Greek forms such as Heliopolis, Arabic forms such as Siut, or modern European forms such as Luxor and Thebes; this cannot be avoided, and in the end no great harm is done.

In my translations I have indicated free renderings of passages and other interpolations by italics; brackets denote restorations. The gaps which I have been obliged to leave in the translation I could naturally not reproduce in their full length, which is often considerable. I have been content to distinguish between two kinds of such omissions: . . . means that a single word is omitted, while – – – – indicates that a sentence, or a longer passage, is missing.

Herr Grapow, before the printing was begun, undertook the tedious task of comparing my translations once more with the originals, whereby various omissions and mistakes have been avoided. I thank him here once more for this friendly service.

ADOLF ERMAN

PFORTA, *January* 1, 1923

[1] An *e* is quite arbitrarily inserted throughout, and, moreover, the so-called weak consonants *alef*, *ayin*, *w*, and *y* are rendered by *a*, *u*, and *i*. Still, in the use of many oft-recurring names, one allows oneself the privilege of acting differently.

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OUTLINE OF EGYPTIAN HISTORY

THE customary division into "Kingdoms" and "Dynasties" must, in view of our defective knowledge of Egyptian history, be retained. The dates given here are, from *circa* 2000 B.C. onwards, approximately correct. The lower figures have been adopted for the time of the Old Kingdom, the various estimates for which still differ by centuries.

OLD KINGDOM.

Dynasty 3 : 3000–2900 B.C.
A period still almost entirely unknown to us (pp. 37, 66).

Dynasty 4 : 2900–2750 B.C.
King Snefru (pp. 38, 111), and the builders of the great pyramids—Kheops (p. 36), Khephrēn (p. 36), and Mykerinos.

Dynasty 5 : 2750–2625 B.C.
Flourishing period for the art and possibly also for the literature (p. 54).

Dynasty 6 : From 2625 onwards.
About 2500 a political collapse (see p. 93) ; Egypt sinks into obscurity.

PERIOD BETWEEN THE OLD AND MIDDLE KINGDOMS.

Egypt has broken up into separate states. About 2360 B.C. Akhthoes (p. 81) founds the kingdom of Herakleopolis (pp. xxiv, 75, 116), and under him the languishing civilization once more revives. The coexistent Eleventh Dynasty in Thebes gains the upper hand after prolonged struggles (pp. 79, 82).

MIDDLE KINGDOM.

Dynasty 12 : 1995–1790 B.C., a period of high attainment both in political power and in general culture.
Its founder, Amenemhēt I (1995–1965) puts an end to the disorders (pp. 15, 72 ff., 111 ff.).

His son Sesōstris I (1975–1934; see pp. 15, 49) and King Sesōstris III (1882–1845; see p. 134), extend their dominion over the neighbouring countries. Amenemhēt III (1844–1797; see p. 84) turns the Fayyûm into cultivable land.

Dynasty 13: from *circa* 1790 B.C.; downfall of the realm. Egypt is overthrown by a barbarous people from Asia, the Hyksōs, who bear rule from their capital Avaris (on the north-eastern frontier of the Delta). From among their vassals the princes of Thebes become independent (see pp. 52, 165), and one of these, King Amōsis (*circa* 1580 B.C.), succeeds in expelling the Hyksōs.

New Kingdom.

Dynasty 18: Period of the highest attainment in general culture and in political power. Thebes becomes the capital, and its god Amūn the chief of the gods. Thutmōsis I (*circa* 1555–1501) and his son Thutmōsis III (*circa* 1478–1447) create an empire that extends from the Sudân to the Euphrates (see pp. 167, 254).

Amenōphis III (*circa* 1415–1380 B.C.); a long, brilliant reign, in which, however, there are already signs of a revolution. This comes to pass under his son Amenōphis IV (from 1380 B.C.), who strives to bring about a religious reformation associated with pure sun-worship (pp. 288–292). On meeting with opposition, he deserts Thebes and founds a new capital at El-Amarnah, in Middle Egypt; the art also takes on a new character and the old literary language is replaced by the colloquial (p. xxvi). The king henceforth calls himself Ikhenaton. The later history of this heretical period is quite obscure; all we know is that the old faith finally triumphed (pp. 293 ff., 309).

Dynasty 19: *circa* 1350–1200 B.C.

The centre of gravity of the realm lies henceforth in the Delta, though Thebes remains the sacred city, which is adorned with the enormous temples of Karnak, Luxor, etc.

Sēthos I (*circa* 1320–1300) fights against the Bedouins of Palestine. His son, Ramesses II (*circa* 1300–1234), wages a long war with the Hittite empire in Asia Minor for the possession of Palestine (pp. 261–270), and founds the new Residence, House-of-Ramesses (pp. 206, 270 ff.). The power of the empire declines. Under his son, Merneptah, a war against the Libyans, and battles in Palestine against, among other peoples, the tribe of Israel (pp. 274–278). Then a period of internal disorders.

Dynasty 20 : Reign of Ramesses III (*circa* 1200–1169 B.C.), a period of revival ; then under his successors, all bearing the name Ramesses, the complete downfall.

Dynasty 21 : *circa* 1090–945 B.C.
The high-priest of Amūn, Hrihōr, becomes king in Thebes, and there are other princes in other cities, *e.g.* Smendes, in Tanis (p. 175).

THE END.

Dynasty 22 : One of the Libyan princes, who had long been settled in the country, Sheshonk, makes himself king about 945 B.C. His family reigns in different princedoms.

Then follow : *circa* 712 B.C., the conquest by the Ethiopians ; *circa* 670, the conquest by the Assyrians. Under the family of Psammetikhos I (663–525 B.C.) the unhappy country enjoys a period of revival, but the Persians put an end to this (525 B.C.). Egypt becomes again independent at intervals, until it at last falls to Alexander (332 B.C.).

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITERATURE

THE Egyptian people became known to our European world only in their dotage, when they had expended their last energies in unsuccessful struggles against foreign oppressors. They clung tenaciously at that time to the beliefs and the outworn practices of the past, as if by so doing they could still maintain their position among the nations of the earth. The Greeks viewed with a mixture of disdain and reverence this survival from a remote past, so utterly out of keeping with their own enlightened world. Thus the Egyptians have lived on in the conception of Europeans as the Chinese, so to speak, of antiquity, and, despite all the discoveries of our time, they still bear the reputation of having been a strange people, ossified and without any proper development.

And yet in the earlier millennia of their history the Egyptians were the exact antithesis to this popular conception—a gifted people, intellectually alert, and already awake when other nations still slumbered; indeed, their outlook on the world was as lively and adventurous as was that of the Greeks thousands of years later. That is plainly to be seen in their vast technical achievements, and still more so in their plastic art, which reproduces life so joyously and with so sure a touch.

It is not to be wondered at that so gifted a people took a pleasure in giving a richer and more artistic shape to their songs and their tales, and that in other respects also an intellectual life developed among them—a world of thought extending beyond the things of every day and the sphere of religion. And since the Egyptians had also invented a system of writing, there grew up among them at an early date a body of writings of a varied kind, which they cultivated and esteemed con-

sciously, and to which we do not ascribe too much honour if we speak of it as their literature.

But while the works preserved from the plastic art of the Egyptians are so many, that we have by now gained a conception of it which could not be greatly modified, our position with regard to the literature is unfortunately very different; for of this we possess comparatively little. And how could it be otherwise, seeing that the preservation of a literary work depends upon an unlikely chance making it possible for a fragile sheet of papyrus to last for three or four thousand years! Accordingly, out of a once undoubtedly large mass of writings, only isolated fragments have been made known to us, and every new discovery adds some new feature to the picture which we have painted for ourselves of Egyptian literature. And on the whole this picture is now a fairly correct one, for it possesses an intrinsic probability. Each of the large chronological divisions, into which it falls, displays a special uniform character, and this character harmonizes with what we otherwise know about the period in question.

As far back as we can trace it, the Egyptian language displays signs of being carefully fostered. It is rich in metaphors and figures of speech, a "cultured language" which "composes and thinks" for the person who writes. One at least of the old books of proverbs [1] may even have been composed during the Old Kingdom, in the time of the Fifth Dynasty (*circa* 2700 B.C. or earlier), which is known to us as an age in which the plastic art was at a particularly high level. But the full development of the literature appears only to have been reached in the dark period which separates the Old from the Middle Kingdom,[2] and in the famous Twelfth Dynasty (1995–1790

[1] See what is said with regard to the *Proverbs of Ptahhotep* on p. 54, below.

[2] Three of the most important books of the older literature—the *Instruction for King Merikerē*, the *Instruction of Duauf*, and the *Complaints of the Peasant*—will have been written under the kings who then ruled from Herakleopolis over Middle Egypt and the Delta. We know very little of them, and therefore ordinarily assume that they played an unimportant rôle in the development of the Egyptian people. Yet it may well be possible that it was at their court that the literature blossomed forth. This is also suggested by Blackman, who draws attention to the remarkably high level of the art of that period as displayed in the tombs of Meir (see *Discovery*, iii. pp. 35 ff.; *Journ. of Egypt. Archæology*, xi. pp. 213 f.; *Luxor and its Temples*, p. 42).

B.C.). It is the writings of this age that were read in the schools five hundred years later, and from their language and style no one dared venture to deviate. The feature which, from an external standpoint, gives its character to this classical literature —it cannot be called by any other name—is a delight in choice, not to say far-fetched, expressions. "To speak well in good sooth" is regarded as a high art, to attain to which an effort must be made. That this was really the tendency of this epoch is to be seen also from its inscriptions, which, so far as they originate from educated people, are composed in the same elaborated style. However, it would not be correct to maintain that the real achievement of the classical period is to be seen in this stylistic art. Be it rather said that its writers venture upon very diverse and remarkable topics, and do not recoil from even the more profound questions.

On the other hand, the actual religion falls into the background in this body of writings, and hardly anything is said in these books about all the divinities, with the worship of whom, according to current conception, the Egyptians were so much occupied. It might be supposed that, for an educated person of this period, the old faith was just an inheritance which he outwardly cherished; in his world of thought he contented himself with the indefinite idea of "God."

We have no intention of blinding our eyes to the fact that a great deal must be lost of precisely this old literature; we cannot well suppose that there were no love-poems at that time, or that collections of proverbs were much more frequent than hymns to the king. To this phenomenon there apparently contributed, besides blind chance, a special circumstance, which gives to what is scholastic in the literature a prominence beyond its due. Our papyri are derived mostly from tombs, and it would be natural enough for a boy to have his exercise-books placed with him in the grave, whereas books of another character were retained for the living.

However that may be, in the second period of the literature also, that of the later New Kingdom (since about 1350 B.C.) the schools are no less to the fore.

This later literature grew up in opposition to the old tradition. Until then, through all the centuries, the language of the classical literature had been retained as the literary language, and at most it had permitted itself to approach the actual

colloquial language in documents of everyday life or in popular tales.[1] Finally, however, the difference between both languages became so great, that the classical language could scarcely be understood by ordinary people.[2] In the great revolution at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, which we associate with the name of Amenōphis IV, these shackles also were broken. Men began to write poetry in the actual language of the day, and in it is composed the beautiful hymn to the sun, the manifesto of the reformed religion. But whereas the other innovations of the heretical *régime* disappeared after its collapse, this particular one survived, doubtless because the conditions hitherto existing had become impossible. Under the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties there burst forth into flower a vigorous literature, written in the new language, which we call New Egyptian, and to which belong almost all the writings contained in the second half of our book.

In the New Egyptian epoch also the schools thrust themselves into prominence, but their productions have now a more lively tone than they had in the old epoch. And this liveliness is, moreover, characteristic of the literature of this period; men saw the world as it is and took a pleasure in it. On that account, indeed, so far as our knowledge goes, the profounder thoughts are wanting; though actually a new discovery may correct our judgment in this respect.

New Egyptian literature, which, as we might suppose, had set out to be really popular, did not long pursue this course, and soon the same striving after refinement of expression, which characterized the older literature, is active in it also. The language of the educated person was again adorned with far-fetched words and phrases, and he delights in embellishing it with foreign words. For something like five centuries this later literature appears to have been cultivated, and then its language also became a dead one, which the boys at school had to learn; and with that the literary life in decadent Egypt seems to have expired. It was not till several centuries later, perhaps only

[1] See, *e.g.*, below, the *Story of King Kheops and the Magicians*; the reader will notice the simplicity of its language even in translation.

[2] If the writing, which omits all vowels, did not gloss over a considerable part of the deviations, the difference would seem as great to us as that separating Old High German from modern German, or Italian from Latin.

in the Greek period, that a new literature appears, the so-called demotic, which does not come within the scope of this book.

I have spoken above of the foreign words, of which the writings of the later New Kingdom are full. They are almost all borrowed from the inhabitants of Palestine, and show, as is known to us from other sources, in what close relationship Egypt and Palestine then stood. We may therefore suppose that Canaan was also influenced by Egypt in the sphere of literature, just as it was in that of sculpture. We should certainly encounter Egyptian influence in the literature of the Phœnicians, were that preserved; but in Hebrew literature also, which belongs to so much later a period, there are a number of features that strikingly remind one of the body of Egyptian writings—namely, in the wisdom-literature of the Hebrews, in the Psalms,[1] and in the Song of Songs. It might be supposed that similarities of this sort are to be traced, at least indirectly, to Egyptian prototypes. That being so, then even we ourselves must, without suspecting it, have all along been under the influence of the intellectual life of Egypt.

2. THE LEARNED SCRIBES

I have spoken in the preceding paragraphs of the cultured classes as the upholders of the older and later literature, and possibly this expression may strike many as being too modern. And yet it is correct. Through the Egyptian people from the earliest period there ran a deep cleavage, which separated him who had enjoyed a higher education from the common mass. It came into existence when the Egyptians had invented their writing, for he who mastered it, however humble his position might outwardly be, at once gained a superiority over his fellows. Without the assistance of his scribes even the ruler was now of no account, and it was not without good reason that the high officials of the Old Kingdom were so fond of having themselves represented in writing posture; for that was the occupation to which they owed their rank and their power. The road to every office lay open to him who had learnt writing and knew how to express himself in well

[1] See the essay by BLACKMAN in SIMPSON, *The Psalmists*, Oxford, 1926, pp. 177 ff.

chosen terms, and all other professions were literally under his control.

There thus developed among the scribes a pride and a caste-consciousness, that are very evident in the old literature which they created (more so in fact than accords with our taste), and that also distinguish all their inscriptions. Still we ought not to condemn this mandarinism, for it did set up an ideal of the official, which possesses some elements of greatness. The official is to be impartial, one who protects the insignificant against the powerful; the clever person, who knows a way out even in the midst of the greatest difficulties; the humble one, who never thrusts himself forward, and yet whose opinion is heard in the council. His every writing and utterance, too, must be distinct from the vulgar. In this spirit generation after generation of scribes did their work, and they brought up the younger members of their class on the same principle. And in the New Kingdom, likewise, the tendency of the bureaucracy and its schools[1] remained the same, and, despite all external differences, the preceptors' letters preach nothing but what the old wisdom-books had preached, except that their teaching is clothed in a wittier garb, and that the arrogance of their outlook is, if possible, more strongly evinced in them than ever.

3. SINGERS AND STORY-TELLERS

The educated "scribes," it is true, created Egyptian literature, but there existed before them, and in addition to them, persons who practised a less sophisticated art—an art that exercised an influence, moreover, on the literature.

Whoever is closely acquainted with modern Egypt will carry about with him a recollection of the singing of the *fellâhîn* and boatmen, whose monotonous songs resound continually over the green fields and over the yellow Nile. I do not know if the peculiar nasal drawl of this singing, which strikes us as so peculiar, is to be claimed as an inheritance from ancient times, but the joy in singing certainly is. The peasant and craftsman of Ancient Egypt also accompanied their work with their unpretentious singing, which so obviously formed part

[1] Particulars as to the schools of the New Kingdom are to be found in the introduction to the section concerned with that subject.

of the task in hand, that the sculptor, when depicting this, also added the song to the representation. Such songs from the different periods I give below in the appropriate sections. What the beauties of the *harîm* sing in their lord's presence is unfortunately not included in the representations of them. We see only that one body of girls sings in accompaniment to the dance, which the other executes; what they are singing will scarcely have been so naïve and innocent as the songs of the workpeople! At all times we meet with blind men as singers,[1] and it cannot be doubted that these unfortunates were professional musicians. There were certainly also professional female singers, and at the end of the New Kingdom, in the *Voyage of Unamūn*, we shall actually encounter an "Egyptian female singer" in Syria, where she, in her way, will have spread Egyptian civilization.

If the male and female singers have thus found admission into the series of tomb-scenes, we nevertheless search there in vain for the other representative of popular art, the story-teller. That is not to be wondered at, for he plied his trade, not in the house of the noble lord, nor yet in his fields, but recited his stories only to the common people in the street, and street-life is not depicted in the tombs. And yet the story-teller in ancient times certainly entertained his simple-minded audience just as he does in Egypt at the present day; for from all periods of Egyptian history we possess popular narratives, whose tone and contents indicate such an origin. If the tales of the modern story-tellers are preferably made to revolve round some historical personality, the Sultan Bibars, or the Khalif Harūn, those older stories are also connected with figures famous in history. From the Christian period in Egypt we have a tale of Cambyses, and from the Greek period one about Nektanebus; Herodotus has preserved to us among others the delightful story of Rhampsinitus, and in demotic papyri we read of King Petubastis and of the high priest Khamoes. Then from the end of the New Kingdom we have the stories of King Thutmōsis III, and of the Hyksōs king Apōphis, and from the end of the Middle Kingdom those of Kheops.

The same naïve, and at times burlesque, tone is displayed in much of what Egypt has bequeathed to us as mythology—legends of Isis and Osiris, of the old sun-god and his drunken

[1] See, *e.g.*, BLACKMAN, *Rock Tombs of Meir*, ii. Pl. III. pp. 12 f.

messenger (p. 47), and of the goddess who would not return to Egypt again.[1] These stories look as though they had been transmitted by people who took into account the taste of the masses. That they finally also attained religious currency in this popular form does not speak against such an origin.

4. THE FORMS OF THE POETRY

All that the Egyptian writes in elevated language falls into short lines of approximately equal length, and although we know nothing about their sound, we are none the less inclined to regard these lines [2] as verse, *i.e.* to ascribe to them some sort of metrical structure. This is in many cases undoubtedly correct, positively certain in those where invariably, as the meaning shows, a fixed number of lines—generally there are three or four—belong together :

Thou embarkest on thy ship of cedar-wood,
That is manned from bow to stern,
And thou arrivest at this thy fair mansion,
Which thou hast builded for thyself.

Thy mouth is full of wine and beer,
Of bread, and meat, and cakes ;
Oxen are slain and wine-jars opened,
And pleasant singing is before thee.

Thy chief anointer anointeth with kemi-unguent,
Thy water-bailiff beareth garlands,
Thine overseer of the country folk presenteth fowl,
And thy fisherman presenteth fish.[3]

These are indubitable verses.

Many such poems show, in addition, the peculiarity of all their stanzas having the same opening word. Thus in the *Dispute with his Soul of one who is tired of Life*, the eight stanzas of the first song all begin with " Lo ! my name is

[1] One may also compare the *Tale of the Two Brothers*.

[2] The scribes of the New Kingdom divide them up mostly by means of red dots, which they also employ, however, in purely prose texts as stops.

[3] See below, p. 212.

abhorred," those of the second with "To whom do I speak to-day?" etc.[1]

In the hymn on the victory of Thutmōsis III the connection is, as a matter of fact, a double one, for the third lines of the stanzas have also the same beginnings; the first lines begin with "I have come that I may cause thee to tread down . . .," the third with "I show them thy majesty . . ."; the second and fourth have optional beginnings.

But these initial similarities are to be found also in texts, the sections in which are of varying length, and display no regularity with regard to the number of lines. Such irregular sections are also to be recognized as stanzas, only of a freer structure. And there will naturally have been such freer stanzas in poems, in which they are not revealed by the similarity of the opening words. It can be seen that we are here still groping almost entirely in the dark,[2] and shall probably always be doing so, since the question, upon which everything depends,—what metre did Egyptian verses have?—remains an unanswered one for us.

As to this question, we can at most venture on a supposition. If we assumed, what on the ground of grammatical considerations is probable, that every virtual word in the language—substantive, adjective, verb, etc.—had only one strongly accented vowel, then every Egyptian line of verse would have had two to four accentuations, with optional depressions between; we should thus have verses in a free rhythm and not in a rigid metre. The fact that the Egyptians of the Christian epoch, the Copts, actually constructed their verses in the same free manner would well agree with this supposition:

Ershan-uróme bók epshmó
tef-er-urómpe shaf-któf epef-éy
a-Archellítes bók etanséf
is-uméshe enhóu epináu epef-hó.

Another mán who goés abroad
Tarries a yeár and retúrns to his houśe.
But Archellíte to schóol he hath góne,
And how mány the dáys till I loók on his fáce!

[1] In New Egyptian poetry the custom of lines having the same beginning no longer exists.

[2] I have therefore in my translations avoided breaking up the printed text into verse-lines, apart from a few instances of absolute certainty.

The Ancient Egyptian quatrains must have sounded something like this Coptic one.

Such free rhythm is also vouched for by yet another circumstance: when a verse, for example, is repeated, a longer expression can be interpolated in place of a single name, and instead of the "Osiris awaketh in peace" of the first stanza, there can be sung in the second "The ever enduring, the lord of victuals, that giveth sustenance to him whom he loveth, awaketh in peace."

But in this discussion I have so far not touched upon the feature which lends all this poetry and semi-poetry its special character, the extraordinary custom which we are wont to call "parallelism of the members." It is not enough to express an idea once, it must be done twice, so that two short sentences, of the same or similar purport, always follow one another. Thus, for example: "The judge awakeneth, Thōth lifteth himself up," or: "Then spake these friends of the king, and they made answer before their god," where in both instances the second sentence is quite superfluous. Or again: "They that enter into this tomb, they that behold what is in it," where the repetition does introduce something new. It is the delight in fine speeches that has been responsible for this peculiar mode of expression; the speaker feels that he could have employed, for what he has just said, yet a second no less telling phrase, and he cannot resist the temptation to utter it once again in this version. In process of time it became an established fashion, that will have been regarded as the natural ornamentation of dignified speech. The Old Testament has accustomed us to this strange mode of expression—for it prevailed just as much among the Hebrews and Babylonians—and so in Egyptian texts it does not surprise us as much as it should. But its absurdity is fully appreciated so soon as a piece of other poetry is rendered in this style. The fifth book of the *Odyssey*, which begins:

> "Now the Dawn arose from her couch, from the side of the lordly Tithonus, to bear light to the immortals and to mortal men. And lo, the gods were gathering to session, and among them Zeus, that thundereth on high, whose might is above all";

would read somewhat like this in the Egyptian style:

The Dawn raised her up from the bed of Tithonus,
And the Red Glow of Morning arose from her resting-place,
That she might shine for the immortals,
And bring light to mankind.
Now the gods were going to the assembly,
And the immortals sat them down to take council.
In their midst was seated Zeus the thunderer,
And the king of gods was enthroned at their head,
He whose strength is great,
And his might surpasseth all.

That all this is narrated in a pleasing manner may be true enough, but such a method waters down the narrative far too much.

However, this parallelism was never consolidated into an established form for poetry, but remained always just a decoration, which was employed, to be sure, without stint, whenever it was desired to express oneself in dignified language.

The pleasure taken in varying an expression led also to the habit of referring to the person, extolled in a song, under repeatedly new names and designations. To this is attributable, for example, the *Morning Hymn* translated below on p. 12, the single verse of which is varied in this manner *ad infinitum*—monotonous to our ears, but only because we cannot appreciate the subtleties of all the carefully chosen appellations. It is also responsible for the peculiar style of the hymns of praise, so characteristic of Egypt. They begin with the name of the recipient of the eulogy, preceded, possibly, by an additional acclamation, such as, "Be thou praised!" or "Adoration to thee!" Then follow, virtually as attributes to this name, pure adjectives, substantives, participles, and relative sentences, which describe the qualities of the object of eulogy or call to mind his achievements [1]—endlessly and confusedly, the more so as the poet attaches no value to a consecutive arrangement of the many things which he calls to mind. Egyptian poetry, therefore, possesses, on the whole, no meaning, and he who reads the lamentations of the prophet of the *Admonitions*, depicting the misery of his time, is surprised to find that this

[1] Examples of such hymns of praise are to be found below among the religious poems of the older period.

poet has made no attempt to keep what is homogeneous more or less together. His heart is full of the country's distress, and he now bursts forth with this complaint and now with that. So it can at least be understood. However, on closer examination, a different impression is gained. The man is improvising, and accordingly any word, which he has used in the last verse, leads him on purely extraneous grounds to a new idea, which he immediately expresses. Thus he says once that all are sated with life, even little children. At the mention of children it occurs to him that the children are killed and thrown on to the high-desert ground. And the high-desert ground brings him again to the mummies, which are there torn from the tombs and cast on to it.

Lastly, mention must be made of two more artifices with which the Egyptians liked to ornament their discourses, though they are not to be numbered among the distinctive marks of poetry—paronomasia and alliteration.

Paronomasia was always a favourite device, and there is, for example, a very ancient ritual for the presentation of offerings, in which a pun is made on the name of every article of food. Punning is regularly employed also in two poems of the New Kingdom, which are given below,[1] though naturally this cannot be reproduced in the translation.

In the times with which we are concerned, cases of alliteration can only now and then be instanced, *e.g.* in the two following lines of verse, which refer to Amenōphis III: "His club contends against Naharina, his bow bends down the negroes."[2]

But alliterative poems must have existed at that date, for where else can the Egyptians of the Greek period, who were not given to making new discoveries, have obtained the pattern for their alliterative poetry, for which they show such a marked predilection in their temple inscriptions? The priests of that period take delight in presenting to us one and the same sentence with ever new alliterations. Thus they say of the inundation: "The Nile neareth thy nether lands," "the water welleth up over thy wold," "the flood floweth to thy fields," etc. The employment of similar artifices may also be postulated for the New Kingdom.

[1] A love-song and the poem on the war-chariot.

[2] *Mém. de la Mission*, xv. 15, 2.