

# THE UNION SEMINARY MAGAZINE

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NO. II.—NOV.—DEC., 1890.

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## I. LITERARY.

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### DAYBREAK ON THE NILE.

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A green ribbon a thousand miles long, and ten miles wide; striped with a central line of silver; ravelled at the northern end and the threads spread like a half-open fan; this ribbon of verdure stretched directly south from the Mediterranean upon a limitless expanse of scorching, dazzling sand,—that, says Dr. W. B. Wright, was Egypt, the land “in which it seemed always afternoon.” By others the shape of Egypt has been likened to a lily with a crooked stem. At the upper end is a broad blossom, two hundred miles wide, more commonly called the Delta because of its resemblance to the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet; while a button of a bud projects from the stalk, a little below the blossom, on the left-hand side. This bud is the Fayoum, “a natural depression in the hills that shut in the Nile valley on the west, which has been rendered cultivable for many thousands of years by the introduction into it of the Nile water through a canal.” The long and crooked stalk of the lily is the Nile valley, which is a ravine ploughed through the rocky soil in prehistoric times by the great river itself. Well may Rawlinson say that no other country in the world is so strangely shaped, so long compared to its width, so hard to govern from a single centre.

And yet here was established one of the earliest governments known to history. When the curtain goes up on antiquity, it discloses a venerable civilization in the valley of the Nile with political institutions already organized. The fact that

Egypt was thus one of the primitive seats of human society was due largely to physical causes, chief of which was the combination of a mild and open climate with cheap and abundant food. This always leads to a rapid increase of the population, since the cost of living is reduced to a minimum. Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian who travelled through Egypt nearly two thousand years ago, says that to bring up a child to manhood there did not cost more than twenty drachmas (*less than four dollars*). It was simply the richest country on the globe, and as the Arab conqueror Amrou said, when describing it to the Caliph Omar, "All of its riches flow from a blessed river which runs with majesty through the middle of the country." Not only does the river irrigate and fertilize the country by its annual inundation, but it actually made the soil. The whole valley is of alluvial formation. After having scooped out a bed for itself through the desert of sand and rock, this "father of waters" proceeded to fill it up again partially, with its own deposits. Silently and slowly through countless centuries these rich deposits have accumulated until now they are in some places forty feet deep. And these it was that made Egypt "the granary of the world." And it was to these that Herodotus referred when he said that Egypt was "an acquired country and the gift of the Nile," that river

"Whose waves have cast  
More riches round them, as the current rolled  
Through many climes its solitary flood,  
Than if they surged with gold."

The history of the people who occupied this unique and slender strip of soil is no less remarkable than the nature of their country. Like all the great nations of history, they belonged to the Caucasian race, that princely stock which alone of all the divisions of the human family has created what we call civilization; for the achievements of the Chinese and Mexicans, clever as they were, can scarcely be called by that name, since they exercised no influence on the world at large. But, in our study of the splendid exploits of later Caucasian nations, we have sometimes forgotten our debt to those Caucasian Hamites who in the gray dawn of the world's history settled the warm lowlands of the Nile and there laid the foundation of all the arts and sciences which have since instructed

and delighted mankind. For, to them we are indebted not only for the most massive and enduring architecture ever known, not only for a multitude of those domestic implements and arrangements which most obviously differentiate civilization from barbarism, but also for the art of writing itself and for the earliest literary records. It is certain that at least five hundred years before the book of Genesis was written and a thousand years before Homer, the Egyptians were painting elaborate pictures and chiselling alphabetic characters upon stone. On the wall of the Ramessium at Abu Simbel there is a battle-piece dating from the time of Moses, which is fifty-eight feet long and twenty-five feet high, and contains eleven hundred figures. This great picture was therefore no unworthy forerunner of the vast cycloramas like "Gettysburg" and "Manassas" now on exhibition in American cities. These will speedily perish; but that is already more than three thousand years old. In their literary work the Egyptians used great quantities of less durable materials also, such as leather and papyrus. The last was the most common of all, and from it we have derived our word "paper." The papyrus plant was a strong rush with a triangular stem, about twelve feet high, terminating in a broom-like tuft. The "paper" was made of thin slices of the pith, placed one layer across another, and soaked with Nile water, which answered the double purpose of sizing and glue. These sheets were then dried in the sun, treated with a fine wash which made them soft and flexible, beaten with hammers and carefully polished. By joining a large number of these sheets together very long rolls could be made. One of these great papyri, which has come down to us, is a hundred and thirty-three feet long and seventeen inches wide. Such are the oldest books in the world. The contents of these books were as varied as human life. Legal documents, as full of absurd repetition and circumlocution as those of our own time, treatises on poetry, mathematics, medicine, theology, history—in short all kinds of literary records were made by these ancient and enterprising people. Not at intervals, nor in scraps, but continuously, copiously they wrote, like the full and overbrimming flow of their mighty river. To illustrate from a single department, Lenormant says: "There is no country the history of which can be written on the testimony of so many original documents as that of Egypt."

But now we come to the strange fact that this teeming literature, known and read till about the third century of the Christian era, disappeared at that time from view and was lost to the world for fifteen hundred years ; and the still stranger fact that in our own century the genius of man co-operating with the providence of God has brought it once more to view. The fabled fountain of Arethusa has at last become a fact. According to the picturesque Greek legend, the river Alpheus, rising in the mountains of Arcadia, rushed along bright and sparkling through that cavernous limestone region, repeatedly disappearing from view only to emerge again, and then finally sank into the earth, and, passing under the Adriatic sea, burst forth again in a far-away island as the beautiful fountain of Arethusa. So this stream of Egyptian literature, though sinking from sight a millennium and a half ago and covered from view for ages by a troubled sea of revolution and ignorance and indifference, has in these ends of the earth gushed forth again to gladden and enrich the world. Or, to change our figure, the stone lips of the monuments, hitherto dumb as the Sphinx, have now broken the silence of centuries, and Egypt, realizing in herself the fable of her vocal Memnon, salutes the rising sun of an age more enlightened even than any of her own, and testifies with a thousand voices of her ancient civilization and history. "Pyramid and obelisk, sarcophagus and coffin, stele and papyrus and leather have now spoken, and their inscriptions, ranging from 4000 B. C. to the time of Christ, have in a great measure yielded up the authentic history of the dwellers by the Nile ; and its real bearing on the civilization of the West, extending even to our own times, is now beginning to be rightly appreciated." How was this wonder wrought ? How was this light obtained which has thus dispelled the darkness ? How was this wealth of material recovered which seemed so hopelessly lost and which has made theory in regard to ancient Egypt give place to fact and substituted certainty for wild conjecture ?

The writing of the Egyptians was based upon a pictorial representation of the ideas to be expressed. It was not a mere system of picture-writing, however, as the characters were largely phonetic, like the letters of our alphabet. These pictorial characters were called by the Greeks *hieroglyphs*, that is, *sacred carvings*, because of their mistaken idea that they were

used exclusively for sacred inscriptions and that the knowledge of them was confined to the sacerdotal class. Furthermore, the Greeks distinguished three forms of this Egyptian writing, named respectively the *hieroglyphic* (sacred carving), which was large and particularly adapted to monumental inscriptions; the *hieratic* (priestly), which was a shorter or cursive form of the same characters, better suited to the pen and the softer writing materials like parchment and papyrus; and the *demotic* (popular), called also *enchorial* (of the country), which was a later simplification of the system for the writing of civil documents in the common dialect. All three forms continued to be used until Christianity became dominant in Egypt. Then they ceased to be used or even read. For, as the idolatrous religion of the ancients was abhorred by the Christians, their writings, which dealt so largely with religion, were first discountenanced, then neglected, and finally forgotten. Thus "the veil dropped over the meaning of the hieroglyphs" about the third century of our era, and not till the nineteenth was that veil lifted. The corner of it had indeed been raised a little way, for in the last quarter of the eighteenth century George Zoega, a Dane, made two remarkable discoveries: (1) that some of the characters were letters, and (2) that the oval rings or *cartouches* contained proper names. These gave only a glimpse, but it was a clear and true one. Others before Zoega had endeavored to get some clue to the strange characters which covered the monuments and papyri, but these attempts were not only unsuccessful, but ridiculous. For instance, in the seventeenth century, Athanasius Kircher, a learned Jesuit, who was master of twenty languages, published a work maintaining that the hieroglyphs were mystic symbols and giving translations of some of them. One group he read thus: "The benevolent guardian of productiveness, He who in heaven is fourfold powerful, gives, through the agency of the benevolent Mophtha, the ethereal moisture to Ammon, who is mighty in the underworld, and is moved by his statue and fit ceremonies, to exercise his power." How close this extraordinary nonsense came to the mark may be seen from the statement that the same group is now known to mean simply "The August Emperor, Domitian"! In 1762 the Abbe Tandeau, an eminent French scholar, affirmed that the hieroglyphs were

only arbitrary signs used as ornaments to decorate the buildings upon which they were placed. Why ancient Egyptians should have decorated in this way millions of sheets of papyri also, the Abbe forgot to explain. Even as late as 1802 Chevalier Palin, one of the most learned men of his time, asserted that it was only necessary to translate the Psalms of David into Chinese, and write them in the Ancient Chinese characters, in order to reproduce the Egyptian hieroglyphs, and that the papyri contained many Biblical books. Accordingly in 1812 an anonymous author pronounced the inscription on the portico of Denderah to be a translation into hieroglyphs of the Hundredth Psalm. Meanwhile, out of all this darkness there shined a single star, viz.: the suggestion of George Zoega. It was hardly more than a guess. But, as Tennyson says,

“The golden guess  
Is morning star to the full round of truth.”

Zoega's double discovery of the enringed names and the alphabetic character of some of the signs was made in 1797. Two years later this harbinger of the dawn was followed by broad daylight, and the sun rose over the eastern horizon, though its rays still had to struggle through banks of mist.

Napoleon Bonaparte is not usually regarded as a benefactor of humanity, but there is no doubt that, like Cyrus and Alexander the Great, he was used in the providence of God to advance some of the most important interests of mankind. For instance, his expedition to Egypt, though failing to achieve the ends he aimed at, accomplished certain other results of far greater moment. Like the conquests of Alexander in Asia, it brought the East and West closer together and removed many obstacles to the progress of knowledge. Napoleon took with him on that expedition a company of learned men whom he organized into The Institute of Egypt, and whose explorations, transcriptions, measurements and other scientific studies were embodied in their monumental work, the *Description de l'Egypte*. Henceforth this work became the indispensable foundation of all other studies in Egyptology. These savants also put a multitude of hieroglyphic texts within reach of other scholars, and stimulated afresh the attempts at decipherment. These attempts, however, would probably have been as fruitless as all former efforts but for a happy accident, as we are accustomed thoughtlessly to call it. In August, 1799,

Lieutenant Bouchard, an officer of the French Engineer Corps, while throwing up the earth works of Fort St. Julien to command the Rosetta mouth of the Nile, unearthed a large black stone, covered with inscriptions in three kinds of writings. One was Greek, and it stated that the contents were duplicated in Hieroglyphic and Enchorial characters. *This trilingual tablet is the key that has unlocked all the literary treasures of Egypt.* The external facts in regard to it may be briefly stated. From the place of its discovery it has ever since been called **THE ROSETTA STONE**. It is a slab of black basalt, three feet two inches long, two feet five inches wide, and from ten to twelve inches thick, polished on the side that bears the inscription but rough on the other. The tablet is mutilated, part of the Hieroglyphic, *i. e.* the uppermost, portion being broken off. When Rosetta was captured by the English, the stone was made over to them by the treaty of Alexandria, and is now in the British Museum. "There was a certain poetic justice in the sequel", says Prof. Brown. "An Englishman took one step in decipherment, but it was short, and only one. The honor was reserved for a Frenchman of being the real leader in the interpretation of the monumental records of Egypt." But of that more anon. A fac simile of the triple inscription was made in 1802 and distributed among scholars. The Greek text was of course quickly read, and the inscription was found to be a decree drawn up by the priests of Memphis in honor of Ptolemy Epiphanes, king of Egypt, B. C. 196, who had conferred great benefits upon them and the country at large. They therefore enjoined not only that a statue of Ptolemy be set up in every temple in the land, and that he be worshipped as a God with extraordinary honors, but also "that this decree be engraved on a tablet of hard stone, in hieroglyphic, euchoial (or demotic), and Greek characters; to be placed in every temple of the first, second, and third class, near the statue of the ever-living king." As there were so many copies of this decree it was only natural to expect that others would be discovered, and so it has been. Within the last decade a duplicate of the Rosetta Stone has come to light and been secured by the Boulak Museum at Cairo.

After the Greek part of the inscription had been read, scholars fell to work upon the enchorial or demotic part, that is the middle inscription, partly because it was less mutilated, and

partly because it looked less difficult than the hieroglyphic. It was really more difficult, and hence very little was accomplished, though Silvestre de Sacy and Akerblad made a few minor discoveries. The same thing must be said of Thomas Young, the Englishman referred to above, who after some study of the demotic turned his attention to the hieroglyphic text. Surmising, like Zoega, that the cartouches contained the names of kings, and guided by the position of the name in the Greek, he identified conjecturally the word "Ptolemaios" and determined the phonetic value of five characters. But the real decipherer of the hieroglyphs, and therefore the true Oedipus of Egypt's riddle, was JEAN FRANCOIS CHAMPOLLION. This prodigy of oriental learning was born in 1790 and died in 1832. When only fifteen years old he undertook to prove from their names that the giants of Scripture were mere personifications of natural phenomena. His next performance, at sixteen years of age, was more creditable to both his learning and his judgment, for it was the reading of a paper before the Academy of Grenoble to show that the Coptic was the ancient language of Egypt. At eighteen he was made Professor of History in the Lyceum of Grenoble. In 1814 he published his "Egypt under the Pharaohs." He had therefore every possible preparation for the palaeographic exploit which was destined to make him immortal. His work on the hieroglyphs, like Zoega's and Young's, began with the proper names. We have seen that the first clew was obtained by noticing that certain groups of hieroglyphs were inclosed in oval rings, and that these groups answered in position to certain proper names in the Greek, *e. g. Ptolemaios*. Now in connection with the Rosetta Stone Champollion studied also a bilingual obelisk, discovered by Belzoni at Philae, which had a Greek inscription on the base, and one in hieroglyphs on the shaft, the two containing the same matter. In the Greek inscription the name *Ptolemaios* occurs several times and also the name of a queen called *Kleopatra*. Champollion observed that not only did the group representing *Ptolemaios* on the Philae Obelisk correspond exactly to the group representing *Ptolemaios* on the Rosetta Stone, but also that the characters 1, 2, 3, 4, in *Ptolemaios* corresponded respectively to 5, 7, 4, 2, in *Kleopatra*, the first letter in *Ptolemaios* being the fifth in *Kleopatra*, &c. This demonstrated the phonetic character of the hieroglyphs and gave him the sounds of



several additional letters. With these he passed to other names, identifying in the same way *Berenice* and *Alexander*, and of course rapidly enlarging his alphabet at every step, as well as proving his previous results. Additional proof was furnished by the name of *Xerxes* on a vase which had cuneiform and hieroglyphic inscriptions side by side. And in many similar ways the knowledge of this hoary alphabet was confirmed and extended.

But to know the *pronunciation* is not necessarily to know the *meaning*. Any child who can read English can pronounce a page of Latin after a fashion, but to give the sense is not so easy. To *transliterate* is one thing; to *translate* is quite a different thing. The Greek proper names which had furnished the clew were simply transliterated on the Rosetta Stone, that is, written in Egyptian *letters*.

But the subject matter of the Greek inscription was translated, that is, expressed in Egyptian *words*. How was the meaning of these words to be known? Here it was the Coptic language that solved the problem. When Christianity was established in Egypt, early in our era, the religious literature provided for the people was written not in the hieroglyphic or demotic characters but in "an alphabet borrowed from the Greek." This Egyptian language in Greek letters, in which the Coptic Bible was written, continued to be used and spoken till quite recently and was easily read by Champollion. We have already seen that as early as 1807 he believed the Coptic to be the ancient language of Egypt, and in the following year this was shown by Quatremiere to be a fact. Now, when Champollion began to spell out the Egyptian words on the Rosetta Stone, the Philae Obelisk, and other hieroglyphic inscriptions, he soon discovered that these words were essentially the same as those of the Coptic with which he was already familiar. Translation now proceeded apace. Not only then has daylight fully come in the land which first lighted the world in the way of secular civilization, and which had afterwards lain so long in darkness, but it is rapidly approaching high noon.

Such, in brief, is the story of what Niebuhr calls "the greatest discovery of the century." There were not wanting cavillers who denied the value of all the results achieved by Champollion. But all such sceptics and reactionaries were silenced

in 1866, when Lepsius discovered at Tanis the trilingual "Decree of Canopus," a long inscription in an excellent state of preservation; for it afforded a decisive test and confirmed Champollion's results throughout. Lenormant is fully justified in saying that "the hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt may be translated with almost as much certainty as the works of any classical author." Equally true is the remark of a more recent worker in this field, who in referring to the readiness with which the Egyptian texts are now rendered, says, "We do not decipher inscriptions. We read them." And so rapidly are they now being read and so swiftly do startling discoveries succeed each other that works on Egyptology are antiquated almost as soon as they are written. But there is ONE BOOK whose statements are not discredited by any advance in Egyptology. On the contrary, its references to the history and customs of the land of the Pharaohs are found to be always abreast of the latest results of scientific investigation. The nature and significance of this fact we will consider at length in later number of this series.