

Egyptian Mythology and Egyptian Christianity

by Samuel Sharpe

London J.R. Smith

[1863]

scanned at sacred-texts.com, May 2002

[Next: Contents.](#)

CONTENTS.

THE RELIGION OF UPPER EGYPT.	PAGE
The gods created out of visible objects and attributes	2
The goddesses	5
Gods who had been mortals	7
Their families	8
The biography of Osiris	9
His birthplace and burial place	10
Monotheism and polytheism compared	11
Their number increased by division and by union	12
The trinities	14
The animals worshipped	15
Wars about the animals	16
Worship of ancestors	17
Worship of kings	17
Their miraculous birth	18
The sacred tree of life	19
Reasons for this worship	20
The temples described	21
The intercolumnar separation between priest and laity	24
The priesthood	26
The priests' cells	27
The orders of priesthood	28
Their ornaments copied by the Jews	30

Their duties	33
Their ventriloquism, serpent charming, divining	37
Their wives, priestesses	39
Their dress, tonsure, offerings	39
The sacrifice of criminals	41
The pyramids of Memphis and cave tombs of Thebes	42
That of Oimeneptah I.	43
The love for the gods	45
The conquest of the serpent of evil	45
The mummies	47
The four gods of the dead	49
Ceremonies of burial	50
The trial by Osiris	50
The mediators and their atonement	52
Two views of the resurrection	53
The funereal tablets	55
The employments after death	56
Opinions about the future state borrowed by Greeks	57
THE RELIGION OF LOWER EGYPT.	
The rise of Lower Egypt, its foreign population	59
The pigmy Pthah	60
The Cabeiri, or punishing gods	62
They are worshipped in fear	62
Chiun, the foreign Venus	63
Ranpo or Remphan	64
The Persian Anaita	64

The goddess Neith of Sais	65
The funereal Papyrus or Ritual	66
Bigotry and persecution	68
Egyptian opinions in Palestine, Etruria, Cyprus, Malta, and Sardinia	69
The Theory of the Creation	69
THE RELIGION UNDER THE PERSIAN CONQUERORS.	
Persian Sun-worship	73
Plato and the School of Heliopolis	74
THE RELIGION UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.	
The rise of Alexandria	76
The Greek translation of the Bible by the LXX	79
Its peculiarities	80
The Apocryphal Books	81
Philo and the Jewish Monks	83
The Eleusinian mysteries	84
The Alexandrian character	85
THE RELIGION UNDER THE ROMANS.	
The worship of Serapis	87
The worship of Horus	87
The trinities	88
Horus a Child	89
Isis with Horus in her arms	89
This worship introduced into Rome	90
CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE ROMAN EMPERORS.	
Christianity in Egypt	92
Its corruption	93

It raises the Egyptians	94
Gnosticism; its sculptured gems	95
Serpent worship	96
Its Æons, the Ogdoad	97
Its Trinity	99
The Book of Revelation	100
Clemens and Origen	101
The Trinity of Dionysius	102
The Docetæ	
Christians persecuted as political disturbers	103
The rebellions against Rome	103
The worship of Mithra and Manicheism	104
CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS.	
The rise of Egyptian opinions and the Arian Controversy	106
The Council of Nicæa and Athanasius	108
The Nicene Creed	109
The Athanasian Creed	109
Temples turned into Churches	111
St. George and the Dragon	112
Italy and the West adopt the Egyptian opinions	113
The monastic institutions	114
St. Ambrose, St. Augustin, St. Jerome	115
Theodosius makes Constantinople take Egyptian opinions	116
Egyptian MSS.; relics	117

[Next: The Egyptian Mythology.](#)

THE EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY.

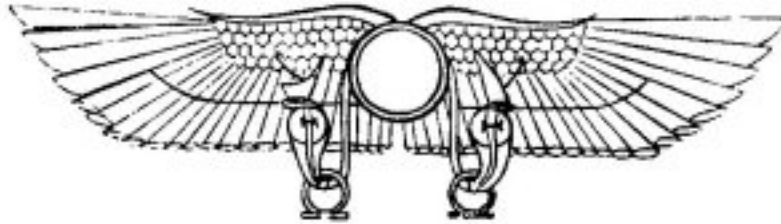


Fig. 1.--The Winged Sun of Thebes.

THE history of religious error is the history of the mind wandering in its search after Truth. We meet among the gross idolatry of one nation, as in the purer religion of another nation, the same acknowledgment that man is not his own creator, and that he is dependent for his welfare upon the will of some being or beings more powerful than himself.

The cultivated man, when studying the wonders of the creation around him, traces them back through numerous secondary causes to one great First Cause, and thus arrives at the belief in One Undivided God; and feels more sure of the truth of his reasoning in proportion to the simplicity to which it leads him. On the other hand, an observing but unphilosophical man, in the childhood of the world when he had noted the various secondary causes which produce all the effects which meet his senses, would perhaps look no further; and he thus arrived at the belief in a variety of gods. But this is not always the case. Some nations seem, like the modern Turks, to have arrived at a belief in one God, as if from indolence of mind, from blind fatalism, from mere want of observation of the numerous causes which are working around them. Thus

many of the Arabic races in the neighbourhood of Egypt, as well as the Israelites, traced the hand of one only God, or Great First Cause, in all they enjoyed and all they suffered. But the Egyptians, like the Greeks and Romans, seeing so many causes at work, and not perceiving that they might all be set in motion by One First Cause, thought that every blessing that they received, and every misfortune that befel them, was the work of a different god. They thus peopled the seen and the unseen world beyond with a variety of beings or powers. To these they returned thanks for the blessings that they enjoyed, or more often, as led by a melancholy and less grateful disposition, addressed entreaties that they would withhold their injuries and punishments. The sculptured monuments of the country teach us the figures and sometimes the characters of these imaginary beings, together with the cities and parts of the kingdom in which each was more particularly worshipped.

[Next: The Religion of Upper Egypt.](#)

p. 2

THE RELIGION OF UPPER EGYPT.

First among these gods of the Egyptians was Ra, *the Sun*, or Amun-Ra, *The Great Sun*, whose warmth ripened their harvests, but whose scorching rays made his power felt as much as an enemy as a friend. His sculptured figure wears a cap ornamented with two tall feathers, and sometimes with the figure of the sun (see Fig. 2). He was the King of the Gods. He was more particularly the god of Thebes.

Over the portico of the Theban temple there is usually a ball or sun, ornamented with outstretched wings, representing the all-seeing Providence thus watching over and sheltering the world. From this sun hang two sacred asps wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt (see Fig. 1).

p. 3

Every Egyptian king bore the title of Zera, *the Son of Ra* (see Fig. 27), and many of the Theban kings took the name of Amunmai, *beloved by Amun*. From him



Fig. 2.--Amun-Ra.



Fig. 3--Mando.



Fig. 4--Hapimou.

the Romans borrowed a name for their god-Jupiter Ammon. This god was at times called Adon-Ra, from a word for Lord, known also in the Hebrew language.

In the western half of the Delta the Sun was worshipped as Mando-Ra. Like Amun-Ra, he wears the two tall feathers, and the Sun on his head, but he differs from him in having a hawk's face (see Fig. 3). In our woodcuts these gods each carry in their left hand a staff, with an animal's head, and in the right hand the character for life. A cow's tail, the ornament of royalty, hangs down behind from the waistband. After the fall of the kings of Thebes we find a violent attempt was made by the kings of the city of Mendes to introduce into Thebes the worship of Mando-Ra, in place of Amun-Ra.

p. 4

Next was Hapimou, *the Nile*, whose waters were the chief source of their food, whose overflow marked the limits between the cultivated land and the desert; to him they owed nothing but grateful thanks. He is a figure of both sexes, having the beard of a man and the breasts of a

child-bearing woman (see Fig. 4). He carries in his arms fruits and flowers, and sometimes waterfowls.

Another great god was their narrow valley, the country in which they lived, clearly divided from the yellow desert by the black Nile-mud, by which it was covered and made fertile, and hence called Chemi, the *Black Land*, or when made into a person, Chem, or Ham. He was the father of their race, called in the Bible one of the sons of Noah, and considered by themselves the god of increase, the Priapus of the Greeks. Chem has a cap with two tall



Fig 5.--Chem.



Fig. 6.--Kneph.



Fig. 7.--Pthah.

feathers like that of Amun-Ra, so large that it was necessary to give him a metal support to hold it on the head. His

p. 5

right arm is raised and holds a whip, his left arm is hid under his dress, which is the tight garment of the Egyptian women (see Fig. 5). In consequence of the confusion arising from the Egyptian guttural, his name is in the Hieroglyphics usually spelled THM, as Champsi, *the crocodile*, becomes Tempsi on the eastern side of the Delta.

Kneph, *the Wind*, or Air, or *Breath of our bodies*, was supposed to be the god of Animal and Spiritual Life. He has the head and horns of a ram (see Fig. 6).

Pthah, the god of Fire, was more particularly the god of Memphis, as Amun-Ra of Thebes; and the kings in that city were said to be "Beloved by Pthah." His figure is bandaged like a mummy, and his head shaven like a priest (see Fig. 7).

Having thus created for themselves a number of gods, their own feelings and what they saw around them would

naturally lead them to create an equal number of goddesses. Of these Neith, the Heavens, was one. She is often drawn with wings stretched out as if covering the whole earth. At other times she is formed into an arch, with her feet and fingers on the ground, while her body forms the blue vault overhead, and is spangled with stars. At other times she is simply a woman, with the hieroglyphical character for her name as the ornament on the top of her head (see Fig. 8). She was particularly worshipped at Sais, and the kings of that city are styled "Beloved by Neith."

Isis, or Isitis, the Earth, or rather the *corn-bearing Land*, the mother of all creation, was another and perhaps the chief favourite with the nation. Her name is derived from SAT, *to sow seed*, like the Latin Ceres. She is known by the throne upon her head, because a throne forms the first syllable of her name (see Fig. 9). But she had so many

characters that she is called by the Greeks the goddess with ten thousand names. She is sometimes Maut, *the mother goddess*, sometimes Hecate, *the sorceress*.

Other goddesses were attributes or feelings made into persons, such as Athor the goddess of Love and Beauty. She has cow's horns (see Fig. 10), and sometimes a cow's



Fig. 8--Neith.



Fig. 9.--Isis.



Fig. 10.--Athor.

head. She also is sometimes called Maut, *the mother*. She belonged to Upper Egypt, and was the wife of Amun-Ra, and gave her name to the city of Aphroditopolis.

Pasht, the goddess of Virtue, has a cat's head (see Fig. 11). She belonged to Lower Egypt, and gave her name to the city of Bubastis. Amunothph III., however, of Thebes, particularly styled himself "Beloved by Pasht."

Mo is sometimes the god, sometimes the goddess of Truth and justice, and is distinguished by ostrich feathers on the head.

When the land was divided into separate estates or properties, Thoth, the *Pillar* or Landmark at the corner of

the field, became an important god; and as the owner's name was carved upon it, he was the god of letters and of all learning. He has the head of an ibis, because the ibis perches on the top of the post. He is often in the act of writing, or of counting the years on the notches at the back of a palm branch from which the leaves have been broken off (see Fig. 12). This palm branch is the hieroglyphical character for the word "year." Thoth was by the Greeks called Hermes, a name which has the same meaning, a *pillar*. The sacred books of the priests were all supposed to have been written by Thoth.



Fig. 11.--Pasht.

Besides these visible objects and attributes or qualities already described, there was a third class of gods, who were spoken of as if they had



Fig. 12.--Thoth.



Fig. 13--Osiris.



Fig. 14--Horus

once been mortal and had lived upon earth. These were Osiris, the husband of Isis; and their son Horus, so named from *Chori*, strong; and Anubis, their second son; and Nephthys, the sister and companion of Isis; and the wicked Typhon, who put Osiris to death. Osiris, like Pthah, is bandaged as a mummy. He wears a tall mitre with a ball on the top, with or without two feathers as side pieces. He holds two sceptres, one is a whip and one is a crosier (see Fig. 13). His name is derived from OSH, *a decree*, and IRI, *to do*, and it means the judge. Horus has a hawk's head, and wears the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, formed of a plate of gold over or around the mitre, as described in Exodus xxviii., xxix. (see Fig. 14). Sometimes he is a crowned hawk. Anubis has the head of a dog or a



Fig. 15.--Anubis.



Fig. 16.--Nephthys.



Fig. 17.--Typhon.

jackal (see Fig. 15), or is represented as the animal a jackal. He never takes a foremost place among the gods, but usually stands as the attendant or servant of Osiris.

Nephthys is known by her name, a dish and a house,

p. 9

upon her head (see Fig. 16). It means *Mistress of the house*, or *Lady*. Typhon is a hippopotamus, usually walking on its hind legs, and with female breasts (see Fig. 17); sometimes with sword in his hand, to show his wicked nature. He is the chief author of evil. In Acts xxvii. 14, a tempestuous wind is called a Typhonian wind.

The above list of gods was further increased by copying the arrangements of a family. Thus Pthah, the god of fire had a son named Imothph the god of science, or medicine. Amun-Ra and his wife Athor had a son named Chonso, who is sometimes only distinguished from his father by the youthful lock of hair on the right side of his head; and sometimes he is known by his having a hawk's face, like Horus, and on his head, not the sun, but the new moon (see Fig. 18). To all these numerous gods a father was given in the person of Seb, or Sebek, the crocodile (see Fig. 19).



Fig. 18.--Chonso.



Fig. 19.--Seb.

Of these gods Osiris and his family alone had any biography. They once lived upon earth. His wife and sister Isis was a goddess, while Osiris himself had two natures: he was partly god and partly man. He was put to death by the wicked Typhon, the hippopotamus, and

p. 10

his limbs scattered to the four winds. These Isis collected and put together again, and Osiris returned to life, but not upon earth. He became judge of the dead in the infernal regions, with the title of Ro-t-Amenti, or *king of hell*, whence the Greeks borrowed the name of Rhadamanthus. His son Horus revenged his father's death, and is styled the Avenger of his father. Horus was the last of the gods that reigned upon earth. Hence he was styled Horus the king. His hawk's head has also the same meaning; the hawk was the bird of royalty. The death of Osiris was piously lamented by Isis and her sister Nephthys; and once a year the Egyptians joined their priests in a melancholy procession through the streets, singing a doleful ditty called the *Maneros*, or *Song of Love*, which was to console the goddess for the death of her husband. But this grief for the death of Osiris did not escape some ridicule; for Xenophanes the Ionian wittily remarked to the priests of Memphis, that if they thought Osiris a man they should not worship him, and if they thought him a god they need not talk of his death and sufferings. This story the Greeks copied, and have given us in the form of the loves and lamentations of Venus, a goddess, for Adonis, who was a mortal. The boar which killed Adonis is no other than the hippopotamus Typhon. This shows us how in poetry, as in architecture and sculpture, Greek taste was sometimes willing to make use of Egyptian invention.

Of all the gods, Osiris alone had a place of birth and a place of burial. His birthplace was mount Sinai, called by the Egyptians mount Nissa. Hence, according to Diodorus Siculus, was derived the god's Greek name Dionysus, which is the same as the Hebrew Jehovah-Nissi. This name Moses gave to the Almighty when he set up an altar to Him at the foot of the holy mountain, a spot

p. 11

sacred alike with Jews and Egyptians (see Exodus xvii. 15). Many cities claimed the honour of being the burial place of Osiris, and thence, perhaps, the profit arising from the offerings to his shrine. The honour, however, seems at last to have been thought to belong more particularly to the island of Philæ.

This story of a dying god shows how little the Egyptians believed him to be an eternal self-existent Being. Indeed, the belief in more than one God is almost a disbelief in any god, in the highest sense of the word; as there can only be one Being who is self-existent, all-powerful, and everywhere present. And the second belief that one out of many gods should die, is hardly more irrational than the first belief that there are many gods. In both cases the believer gives a lower meaning to the word "god" than is given to it by him who worships only one such Being. But our own better views of theology should not lead us to despise these rude beginnings, and first steps in religion, by this earliest of nations.

The belief in One God supposes that the world is being governed by Power acting upon one settled plan which is shown, by observation, to

be both Wise and Good, in a degree so far beyond our understanding that we may safely think it infinite. A belief in more gods than one supposes that the world is governed by Power acting with an occasional change of plan, which if sometimes wise: and good, is by no means always so. And a belief in the numerous gods above described, shows that the Egyptians thought too much of the trials and misfortunes, and too little of the blessings that befall us, and fancied that the ways of Providence were so irregular, and so much less wise and good than if governed by one of themselves, that they could only be explained by supposing a crowd of

p. 12

unseen beings, of whom sometimes one and sometimes another took the trouble to meddle with the doings of men. Such was the unhappy theology of Egypt.

The long list of gods mentioned above was again further increased in two ways. The priests sometimes made a new god by uniting two or three or four into one, and at other times by dividing one into two or three, or more. Thus out of Horus and Ra they made Horus-Ra, called by the Greeks Aroeris. Out of Osiris and Apis the bull of Memphis, the priests of Memphis made Osiri-Apis or Serapis. He carries the two sceptres of Osiris, and has a bull's head (see Fig. 20). Out of Amun-Ra and Ehe the bull of Heliopolis, the priests of the East of the Delta made Amun-Ra-Ehe. To this again they added a fourth character, that of Chem, and made a god Amun- Ra-Ehe- Chem. Out of Kneph *the Spirit*, and Ra *the Sun*, they made Kneph-Ra. Out of Sebek and Ra, they made Sebek-Ra. In this way the Egyptians worshipped a plurality in unity.



Fig. 20.--Serapis.

In the case of division they had two of the name of Anubis, one for Upper Egypt and one for Lower Egypt, and afterwards as many as six of that name. They divided Horus into three persons, upon the rule that everything perfect has three parts; and in addition to Horus the king the son of Isis, and Horus-Ra before mentioned, they made a third Horus, the Scarabeus or beetle. While making out of the god Osiris the new person Osiri-Apis or Serapis, they made a second by uniting him to Pthah in the person of Pthah-sokar-Osiris.

p. 13

The gods were very much grouped in sets of three, and each city had its own trinity. In Thebes it was Amun-Ra, Athor, and Chonso, or father, mother, and son (see Fig. 21). Sometimes, however, they were arranged as father, son, and mother, placing Chonso between his two parents. In Abousimbel and Derr in Nubia, the trinity is Pthah,



Fig. 21.--Amun-Ra, Maut, and Chonso.

Amun-Ra, and Horus-Ra, and these are the three gods to whom Rameses II. is sacrificing the Philistines, in the sculptures at Beyroot. At Abousimbel the king also worships Amun-Ra, Horus-Ra, and Horus of Lower Egypt. At Wady Seboua he is seated in a group with Pthah, Kneph, and Athor. At Silsilis he worships Amun-Ra, Horus-Ra, and Hapimou, the Nile. At Philæ the trinity

p. 14

is Osiris, Isis, and Horus, a group, indeed, common to most parts of Egypt. Other groups were Isis, Nephthys, and Horus (see Fig. 22); or Isis, Nephthys, and Osiris; and with a national love for mysticism the priests often declared that the three in some undescribed way only made one person. The above figures, indeed, do not declare that the three gods are only one; but we have a hieroglyphical inscription in the British Museum as early as the reign of Sevechus of the eighth century before the Christian Era, showing that the doctrine of Trinity in Unity already formed part of their religion, and stating that in each of the two groups last mentioned the three gods only made one person (Egypt. Inscript. Pl. 36, 4, 5).

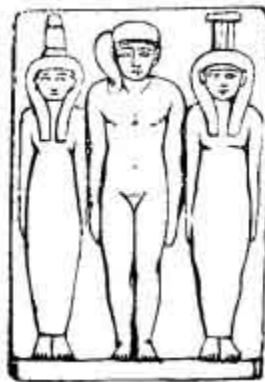


Fig. 22.

The sculptured figures on the lid of the sarcophagus of Rameses III., now at Cambridge, shows us the king not only as one of a group of three gods, but also as a Trinity in Unity in his own person. He stands between the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, who embrace him as if he were the lost Osiris, whom they have now found again (see Fig. 23). We further know him to be in the character of Osiris by the two sceptres which he holds in his hands; but at the same time the horns upon his head are those of the goddess Athor, and the ball and feathers above are the ornaments of the god Ra. Thus he is at once Osiris, Athor, and Ra.

After the gods, the useful and hurtful animals next received worship; the first in acknowledgment of their services, and the latter that they might withhold their

injuries. The ox was worshipped because it ploughed the field; and the cow was never slain because its flesh was very little wanted for food in the warm climate of Egypt, and where they had the buffalo for food, which will not consent to plough in the furrow (see Job xxxix. 10). The sacred bull was called Apis in Memphis and the west of the Delta, and Amun-ehe, or as the Greeks wrote it Mnevis, in Heliopolis and the east of the Delta. He was ornamented with the figure of the sun or full moon between his horns (see Fig. 24). The crocodile was worshipped because he was the terror of those who approached the river's bank. He was called Seb, and made the father of all the gods, and the patron god of some of the Ethiopian kings. Selk, *the scorpion*, was a torturing goddess, perhaps Isis in one of her numerous forms. The Ibis was valued because it destroyed the crocodile's eggs; the cat because it was the enemy of vermin; and the dog and jackal were valued for their service as scavengers. The venomous snakes, and those that were not venomous, were alike honoured, the first as gods of evil, and the second as gods,



Fig. 23.

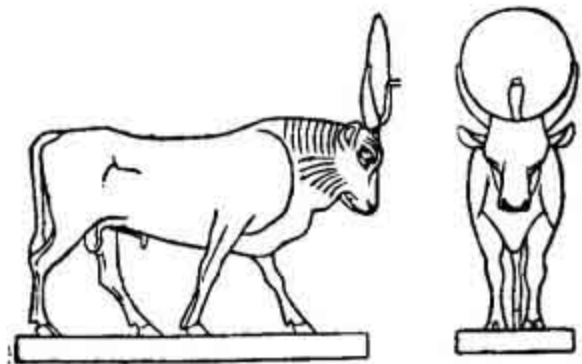


Fig. 24--Apis.

or rather goddesses, of good (see Fig. 25). The hawk was a bird of dignity, and so dedicated to Horus the king. The Scarabæus, or beetle, rolls up before it a ball of dirt in which it wraps its eggs, and hence was made sacred to the Sun (see Fig. 26).

These animals were looked upon as the representatives of the gods mentioned above, and each received a more particular honour in its own city, where their embalmed remains were in many cases buried with almost royal honour. In many cities the earnestness and zeal for their favourite animal often carried the Egyptians into civil war. Juvenal mentions the war in his time between the city of Ombos, where the crocodile was worshipped, and the city of Tentyra, whose people were celebrated for their skill in catching and killing those fierce animals. The Emperor Hadrian was called into Egypt by a rising yet more serious, which might have led to a war between the eastern and the western half of the Delta, as to whether a bull was to be an Apis or a Mnevis. Diodorus the historian was present when the mob rose against the Roman guards because a soldier had killed a cat. The city of Thebes alone had no sacred animals; hence, as Memphis was the second city in size, Apis the bull of Memphis was the animal most thought of by the nation at large. The sums of money spent upon its funeral were enormous; and it was embalmed and buried in a granite sarcophagus with royal honours in the caverns tunnelled into the hill on the west side of the city. No national festival was of equal importance with the ceremony of leading the new Apis into its temple in Memphis, when an animal had been



Fig. 25.



Fig. 26.

p. 17

found marked with the right spots. The priests told Herodotus that its birth was miraculous, that it had no earthly father, but was engendered by divine influence, and that the cow, its mother, never had a second calf.

From a pious regard to those that gave them birth, the Egyptians paid some kind of inferior worship to their father and mother when dead, and to all their forefathers. They dutifully set out food for the use of these dead relations in the neighbourhood of the tombs, and their doing so was carefully mentioned on their own funeral tablets as an act which, like the worship of the gods, they had not neglected in their lifetime. The sculpture which shows the dead man on his knees presenting his offerings to the gods, shows him standing to present the same offerings to his ancestors. When he brings fire and water to the one, he does the same to the others. Such food would soon be devoured by the beasts and birds of the desert; and in the inscriptions Anubis the jackal is called the devourer of what is set out for the dead. The Egyptian superstitions are usually forbidden in the Mosaic Law, and in Deut. xxvi. 13, 14., we see that the Israelites were forbidden to set apart any food for the dead.



Fig. 27.

Every king of Egypt, even while living, was added to the number of the gods, and declared to be the Son of Ra, which was the title set over the second oval of his name (see Fig. 27). He was then sometimes made into the third person of a Trinity, in which case he took the place of the god Chonso, in Fig. 21. He denied that he owed his birth to the father from whom he inherited the crown; he claimed to be born, like the bull Apis, by a miraculous conception. He styled his mother the wife of Amun-Ra, which explains the mistake of Diodorus Siculus, who calls the tombs of

p. 18

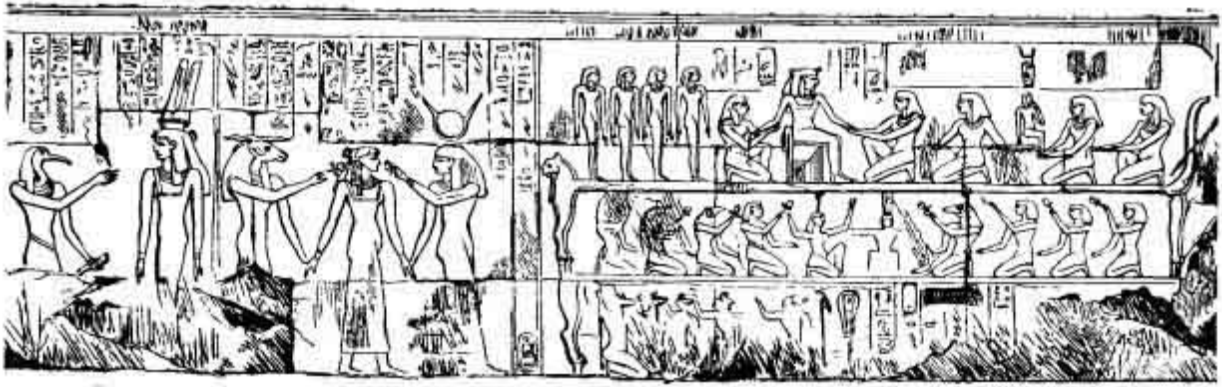


Fig. 28.--The Birth of King Amunothph III.

the queens near Thebes the tombs of Jupiter's concubines. Many of the more favourite kings after their death continued to receive the same divine worship.

This opinion of the miraculous birth of the kings is well explained in a series of sculptures on the wall of the temple of Luxor (see Fig. 28). First, the god Thoth, with the head of an ibis, and with his ink and pen-case in his left hand, as the messenger of the gods, like the Mercury of the Greeks, tells the maiden queen Mautmes that she is to give birth to a son, who is to be king Amunothph III. Secondly, the god Kneph, *the spirit*, with a ram's head, and the goddess Athor, with the sun and cow's horns upon her head, both take hold of the queen by her hands, and put into her mouth the character for

p. 19

life, which is to be the life of the coming child. Thirdly, the queen, when the child is to be born, is seated on the midwife's stool, as described in Exodus i. 16; two of the attending nurses rub her hands to ease the pains of childbirth, while another of the nurses holds up the baby, over which is written the name of king Amunothph III. He holds his finger to his mouth to mark his infancy; he has not yet learned to speak. Lastly, the several gods or priests attend in adoration upon their knees to present their gifts to this wonderful child, who is seated in the midst of them, and is receiving their homage. In this picture we have the Annunciation, the Conception, the Birth, and the Adoration, as described in the First and Second Chapters of Luke's Gospel; and as we have historical assurance that the chapters in Matthew's Gospel, which contain the Miraculous Birth of Jesus, are an after addition not in the earliest manuscripts, it seems probable that these two poetical chapters in Luke may also be unhistorical, and be borrowed from the Egyptian accounts of the miraculous birth of their kings.

The Egyptians had a sacred tree, but want of exactness in the accounts of it leads us to doubt whether it was an Acacia of the sensitive class, that bowed its leaves in silent hospitality to the weary traveller that sat under its slender shade, or whether it was a fruit-bearing tree, the *Balanites Ægyptiaca*. The goddess Neith seated in its branches sometimes is pouring out the characters for life and power on the head of the king. When the pretended philosopher Apollonius of Tyana visited Thebes, the tree, in a womanly voice, declared him to be a teacher sent from heaven. In this it may be compared to the bush out of which the voice spoke to Moses, in Exodus iii. 2. But at other times it is more like the tree of life, or that of knowledge, in the

p. 20

garden of Eden in Genesis iii., as when a priest, after death, is painted as kneeling before the tree, and his soul stands, beside him in form of a bird with human head; and they are both drinking the water which the goddess is pouring into their mouths (see Fig. 29).

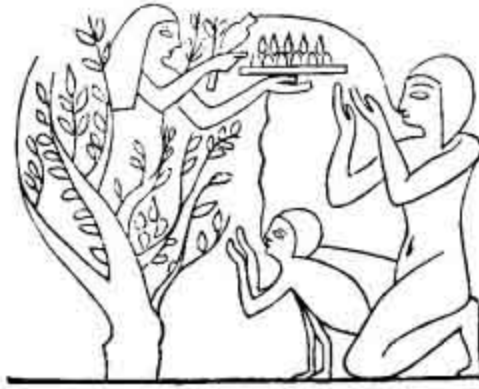


Fig. 29

The Egyptians of course worshipped the statues of their gods as the representations of the gods, themselves who were unseen. But with what religious feelings they worshipped the animals and the kings must be doubtful. In England no sportsman shoots a robin redbreast. In Holland nobody would hurt a stork. Confucius orders the Chinese not to hurt the ox which ploughs the fields for them. The Israelites were ordered not to destroy a fruit tree, even if it belonged to an enemy (Dent. xx. 19). No Dutch child would be so wicked as to pluck up the rush which grows on the bank of the canal, and holds it together by its roots. From feelings such as these may have grown the religious reverence of the Egyptians for animals and plants. So, on the other hand, the shudder felt at the sight of a lion, of a venomous serpent, and even, by some persons, of a spider, may have led to feelings akin to those with which men have worshipped a devil or a god to be feared, and have hoped to appease him by gifts. As to their kings, they were at the head of the priesthood, and received religious respect accordingly. It was part of their duty to present the offerings at the altar of the temple, not only on their own behalf, but on behalf of the nation, to buy the favour of the gods or turn aside their anger.

p. 21

On the walls and columns of the temple the most common sculpture is the group of the king presenting his gift to the god as an atonement for his own sins and the sins of the people (see Fig. [30](#)).

They were mediators between their subjects and the gods. We have a Greek inscription from 241 Egypt declaring that Alexander the Great, being a god, is able to appease Olympic Jove.

The Egyptians were of a gloomy, serious disposition, and they worshipped in fear rather than in gratitude. Their prayers and sacrifices were sin-offerings rather than thank-offerings. The architecture of their temples was in harmony with their religion. The inner sanctuary, the holy of holies, was always a dark room. Fig. [31](#) is the ground plan of the temple of Errebek in Thebes, built by Oimeneptah I., and finished by his son Rameses II. The worshippers were allowed to enter a first courtyard, and a second courtyard through gateways formed of massive towers. An avenue between two rows of sphinxes brought them to the portico, under which the sacrifices and libations were made in their sight and on their behalf. But none

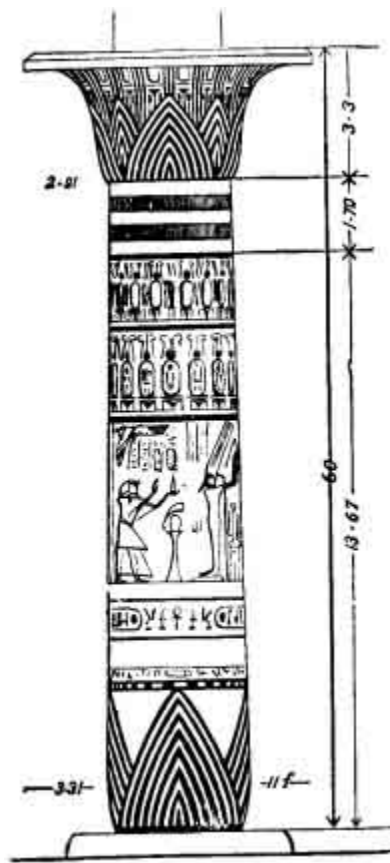


Fig. 30

p. 22

but the priests ever entered the small dark rooms beyond. The portico was handsome but heavy, and grand rather than beautiful; the flat roof was upheld by a row of strong closely set columns (see Fig. 32).

When Moses passed by this spot on his march out of Egypt, not only had the old cave been dug out of the rock, but the newer parts of the temple had been already added; and it was in this neighbourhood that the Jewish Lawgiver set up his own altar to Jehovah-Nissi.

But if we would know the styles of the yet earlier Egyptian temples, we must seek for models of them not in Egypt, but in Ethiopia and in the peninsula of Sinai; as fashions change faster near the capital, and the older style of art must be looked for at a distance. Fig. 33 is the plan of the temple of Seboua in Ethiopia, halfway between the first and the second cataract. It was built in the reign of Rameses II., but as it is at a distance from Thebes it maybe supposed to show us is what the Theban temples were some centuries earlier. Here the more sacred rooms are caves in the side of the hill, while the grand hall, the large courtyard, and the avenue of sphinxes by which it is approached, are on the plain in front of the hill. The yet larger temple of Abousimbel is wholly tunnelled into the hill, and there the sun Amun-Ra was worshipped in chambers ornamented with painted sculptures upon which his rays never fell. The

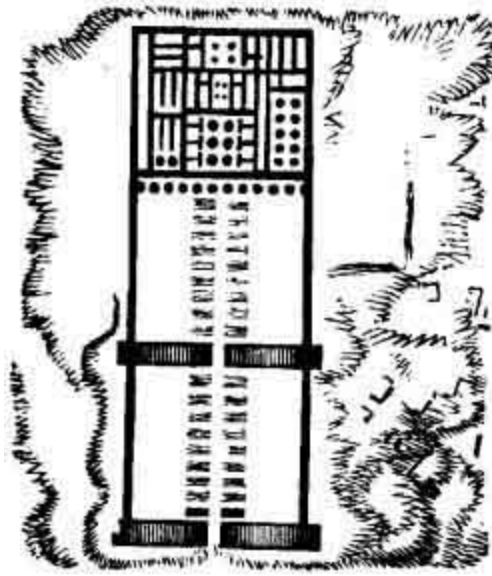


Fig. 31.--Temple of Errebek.

p. 23

small temple of Sarbout el Kadem, near mount Sinai, explains very satisfactorily the progress of temple architecture among the Egyptians (see Fig. 34). Here the inner sanctuary is of one date, a cave in the side of the hill, formed by king Amunmai Thori III.; while the hall and courtyard belonging to it, and in the open air, were added by Thothmosis II. and III., two hundred years afterwards. The inner, older, and darker room, very naturally formed the Sanctuary for the more modern temple that was added to it.



Fig. 32.--Temple of Errebek.

In all the temples of which any ruins remain, built later than that of Errebek, we note a change in the portico, which marks an altered state of the religion; or rather the ecclesiastical feelings of the people. The portico of the

p. 24

Memnonium built by, Rameses II., and that at Medinet Habou, built by Rameses III., were not open to the eyes of the people in the courtyard like that at Errebek. These newer temples had a low wall running, from column to column, which shut out the public from seeing what took place within. The laity were left to imagine the solemnities which their fathers had been allowed to gaze at. This is well shown in the ruined temple of Contra-Latopolis, which was built under the later Ptolemies (see Fig. 35). It is still better shown in Fig. 36, a restoration of the

Temple

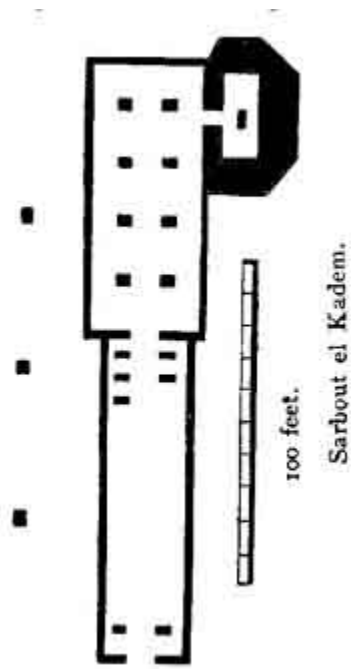


Fig. 33-Temple of Seboua.

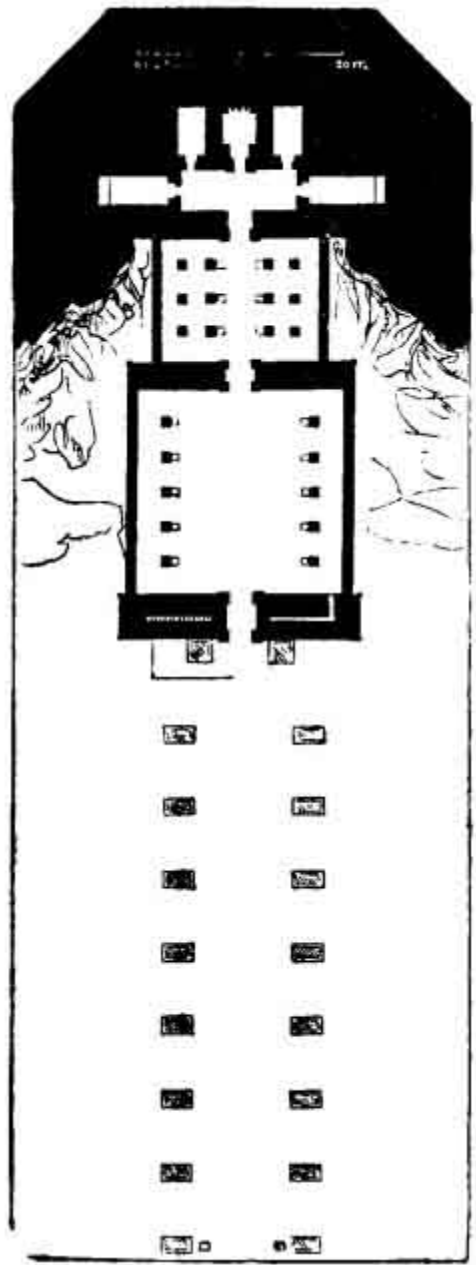


Fig. 34.--Sarbout el Kadem.

of Dendera, which though built in even more modern days under the Roman Emperors, yet in this respect is the

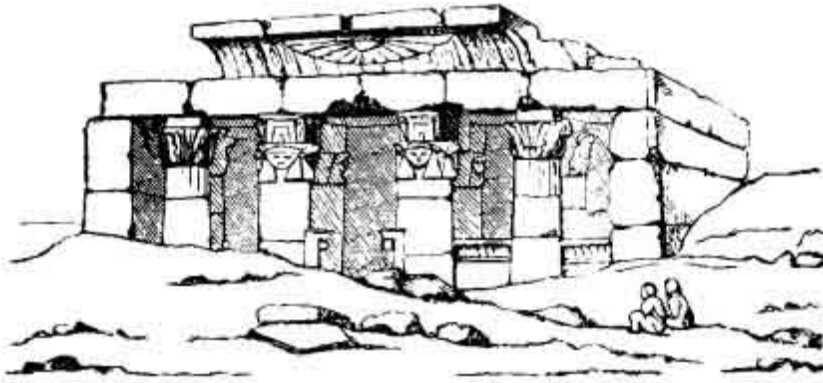


Fig. 35.

same as the temples of Rameses II. and III. This low intercolumnar wall, like the screen in our cathedrals between the choir and the nave, betrays a wish on the part



Fig. 36.

of the priests to increase the distance between themselves and the laity. They thus said to the rest of the nation, Stand apart by yourselves, come not near to us, for we are holier than you are. It was after seeing the evils which thus grew out of an established priesthood that the Jewish lawgiver told the Israelites, that they were themselves "a holy nation and a kingdom of priests" (Exodus xix. 6). They needed no such separate class; and it would seem

p. 26

that it did not exist in Judea till after the establishment of the monarchy.

The Egyptian priesthood was hereditary, and formed one of the three classes into which the nation was divided--namely, the priests, the soldiers, and the cultivators of the soil. They held their estates free from the land tax or rent of one-fifth of the crop, as mentioned in Gen. xlvii. 26. They were the only learned or educated people in the kingdom, and consequently they filled every post and office which needed any education. Not only every clergyman, sexton, and undertaker, but every physician and druggist; every lawyer, writing-clerk, schoolmaster, and author; every sculptor, painter, and land-measurer; every conjuror, ventriloquist, and fortune-teller, belonged to the priestly order. Even those posts in the army which required an education, such as secretaryships and clerkships, were held by priests. Much of the skilled labour of the country was under their control. The linen manufactories in the Delta, and the stone quarries between the first and second cataracts, were both managed by the priests.

Every temple had its own hereditary family of priests, who were at the same time magistrates of the city and district, holding their power by the same right as the king held his; and as the king was at the head of the priesthood, the union between church and state was complete. To each of the temples was attached a large body of priests of lower rank, who assisted at the ceremonies. and waited on their superiors. The temple of the Memnonium of Thebes is surrounded at the back and at the two sides by vaults built of unburnt brick, which would seem to be each a dwelling for one of the priests of lower rank. These cells were at least 130 in number (see Fig. [37](#)).

A smaller number of priests of higher rank, perhaps twenty or fewer, may have lived within the temple in the small rooms around the sanctuary. The duty of these one or two hundred men, who were maintained at the public expense, was to make sacrifices and offer prayers on behalf of the nation, in gratitude for blessings received, and also in order to appease the gods, whom they feared as much as loved. In the temple on the Island of Philæ, built under the Ptolemies, the priests lived in cells within the two courtyards. Those of lower rank may have had the twelve smaller cells on one

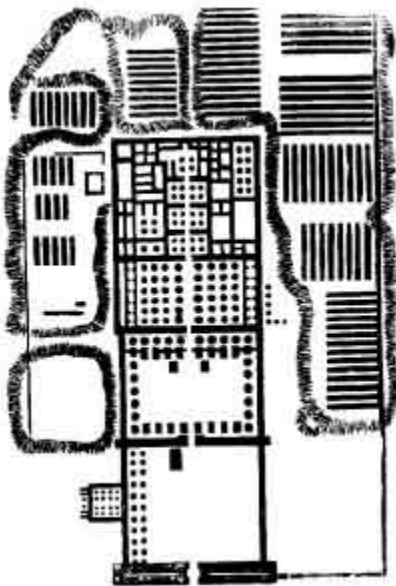


Fig. 37.

side of the inner courtyard, while the chief priests may have dwelt in the larger rooms on the opposite side of this courtyard (see Fig. 38). When the outer courtyard was added to the same temple, fifteen more rather larger cells were built within it for the priests' dwellings. Thus, while the cells for the priests belonging to the Memnonium, in the middle of the city of Thebes, were outside the walls of the temple, in this temple at Philæ, situated at the frontier of the kingdom, the cells were more cautiously placed within the walls of the fortified building. This temple was one of

the places in which Osiris was said to be buried (Diod. Sic. lib. i. 22), and here the priests every day made use of 360 sacred vessels, as they poured out 360 libations of milk in his

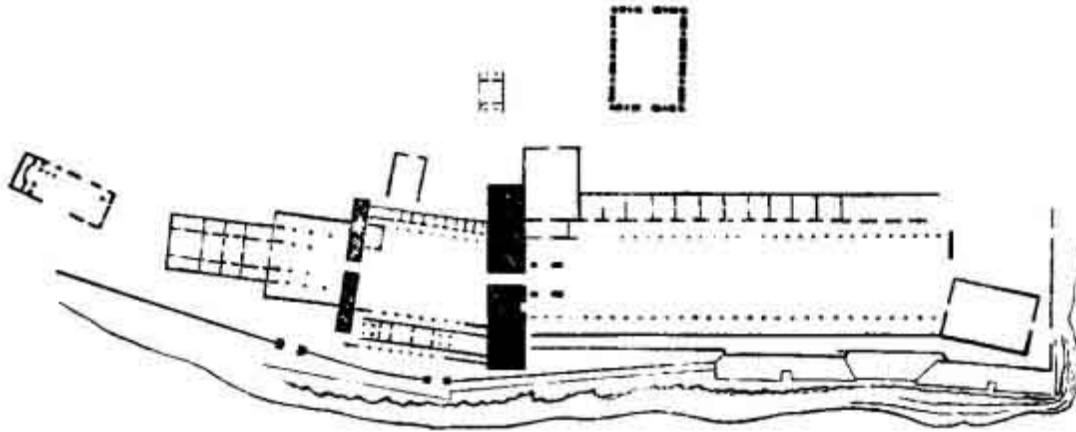
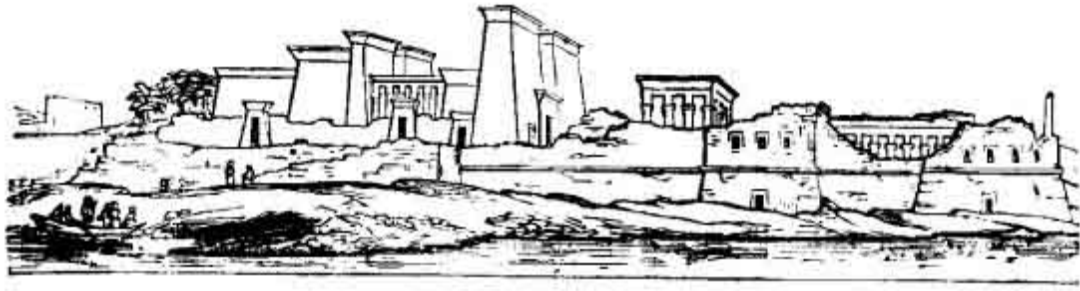


Fig. 38.

honour, and in token of their grief for his sufferings. No oath was so binding as that sworn in the name of Him that lies buried at Philæ, and none but priests were allowed to set foot upon this sacred island.

From the sculptures on the sarcophagus of Amyrtæus we learn that the priesthood was divided into four orders, the Soteno, the Othphto, the Nouto, and the Bachano. Of these the Soteno were the chief, as their name implies. The magistrate of the city was a Soten, or as Herodotus writes it, a Sethon; in Manetho spelt Sethos. The Nouto, whose name means *Holy*, we may suppose were those who performed the sacrifices and other religious duties of a clergyman. Among the Greeks and Romans, while the

p. 29

priest performed the sacrifices, the philosopher wrote on duties and was the consoler of the afflicted, and the poet wrote on theology with the lives and actions of the gods. But in Egypt, as with ourselves, the priest took the three duties upon himself, and hence he ruled the minds of his hearers with a power wholly unknown in Greece or Rome. The Othphto, whose name means *Dedicated*, were probably those under monastic vows, who were confined within the temple walls, and only allowed to speak to strangers through a window. The statues of men seated on the ground in religious idleness, with the chin resting on the knees, probably belong to priests of this class (see Fig. 39). The Bachano were the hired servants, perhaps the same as the Nethenims of the Temple of Jerusalem. The early kings often tell us by their names that they were "Dedicated" to one of the gods, as Amunothph; but afterwards the more humble title of "Servant" to the god is sometimes used, as by Adonra-bachan.



Fig. 39.

How early in the history of Egypt any of the priests, were forbidden to marry does not certainly appear; it is only at a rather late time that we find proof that celibacy was thought a religious virtue. But those who lived confined within the cells in the temples were probably at all times

unmarried.

Chæremon tells us of the painful self-denial practised by some classes of the Egyptian priests in their food and clothing and way of life. They often fasted from animal food, and at all times refused many meats as unclean. They prayed thrice a day and passed their time for the most part alone, in study or in religious meditation. They

p. 30

never met one another but at set times, and were seldom seen by strangers. They slept on a hard bed of palm branches, with a still harder wooden and even stone pillow for the head. Small models of this pillow are often found buried with the mummies as proof of the self-denial practised (see Fig. 43). These were the steps taken by one class of the I priests to gain a power over the minds of their laity. Their more zealous followers



Fig. 43.

practised the same self-torture, and even gashed their bodies with knives in token of grief for their sins, and their full sense of unworthiness.

The Soteno and the Nouto wore crowns, which were distinguished as belonging one to Upper Egypt and the other to Lower Egypt. The Soteno wore the mitre or tall cap with the ball on the top: this was made of linen, and was the crown of Upper Egypt (see Fig. 40). It is that at all times worn by Osiris (see Fig. 13). The Nouto wore a flat ring or plate of gold, with a tall piece before and behind (see Fig. 41) This was the crown of Lower Egypt. These two priestly crowns, when worn one over the other, form the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt (see Fig. 42). This is the crown of the god Horus (see Fig. 14). He was called Horus the king. It was also the usual crown of the King of Egypt, who bore the double priestly title, perhaps pronounced Sot-Nout, meaning *chief* and *holy*, because he was the head of both those orders of priesthood. Both the above-mentioned crowns, the one of linen and the other of gold, were copied by the Israelites, and worn



Fig. 41.



Fig. 42.



Fig. 40

p. 31

the one over the other by the Jewish high priest in the service of the temple (see Exodus xxviii. 36, 39; Leviticus viii. 9).

Other priestly ornaments, borrowed by the Israelites from Egypt, were the little bells and pomegranates which were sewn on to the hem of the high priest's robe (see Exodus xxviii. 33). Many of these golden trinkets are to

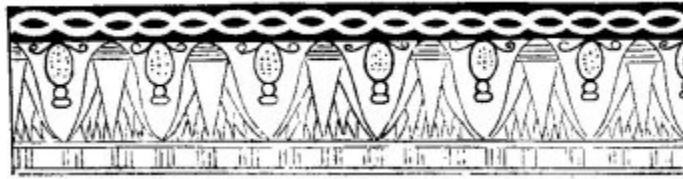


Fig. 44.

be found in our Museums among the Egyptian Antiquities, and they seem to have been copied from the painted borders which form the collars round the neck of the wooden mummy cases, and which are made of lotus flower and fruit alternately (see Fig. 44). The Breastplate of judgment worn by the Jewish high priest, called the Urim and Thummim, meaning emblems of *royalty* and *truth*, was also borrowed from Egypt, as we learn from these names, which are derived from the Egyptian words OURO, King, and THMEI, *justice* or *truth*. In Fig. 45 the

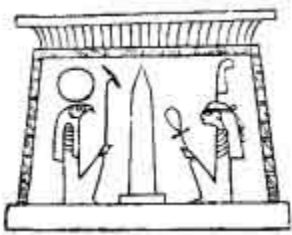


Fig. 45.



Fig. 46.



Fig. 47.

god Horus-Ra is Ouro, and the goddess with the feather on her head is Thmei. In Fig. 46, the Uræus, or sacred asp, is Ouro, and the vulture is Mo, or with feminine

p. 32

article Thmo; and the two together are perhaps a variety of the former ornament. Again, Fig. 47 is the goddess Mo, Mei, or Thmei alone. The breastplate of the Jewish high priest was so far like Fig. 45 as to be, a square divided into two halves (see Exodus xxviii. 16).

The Israelites, however, borrowed fewer religious opinions and ceremonies from Egypt than did the other neighbouring nations. But the brazen Serpent which stood in Jerusalem until the reign of Hezekiah (z Kings xviii. 4.), and the calves which were worshipped at Dan and at Bethel (1 Kings xii. 28), would seem to be parts of the Egyptian idolatry, against which the Prophets so earnestly warned their countrymen. Those chapters, also, in the Book of Genesis which describe the Garden of Eden; its being watered without rain; the sacred tree (see Fig. 29); the cherub with drawn sword guarding the entrance; the serpent, at first upright and talking to Eve (see Fig. 25), then creeping on its belly, and the after war against it (see Fig. 64), and which attempts to explain the origin of sin and death, would seem to belong to the Egyptian mind rather than to the Jewish. In the reign of Solomon the intercourse between Egypt and Judea became very close, and it was, perhaps, in that reign, or soon afterwards, that those chapters about the fall of man were written.

The ark which was borne along by poles resting upon men's shoulders, and contained some of the more sacred emblems of the Jewish religion, need not have been copied from any foreign form of temple service, because it was naturally wanted, when the tabernacle, the centre of their national worship, was moved about from town to town, as in the time of the Judges; but we may remark that in a sculpture representing Rameses III. accompanied

p. 33

by his priests and high officers and the sacred bull Apis, we see that an ark, of the same size as the Jewish ark, was carried along upon men's shoulders in the sacred procession (see Fig. 48). That this Egyptian ark was a prison may be judged from the models of trees at the top; as in some paintings we see wicked imps, the punishing gods, imprisoned in cells which are shown to be pits under ground by the trees growing over them. In Genesis, chap. xxxvii., we read that Joseph was imprisoned by his brothers in a pit

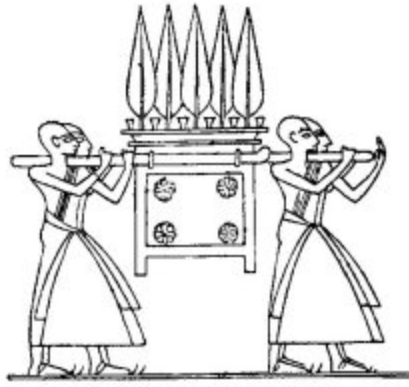


Fig. 48.

or dry well. But what was shut up in the Egyptian ark we are not told, and it is perhaps idle to conjecture; but the only other portable prison or cage that we know of was the basket in later times carried by the priestesses in procession through the streets of Alexandria, which seems to have held a live serpent, the emblem of sin and evil, and the great enemy of the human race (see Fig. 85). The quarrel between mankind and the great serpent is the subject of many of the sculptures in the tombs, and it always ends with the enemy being conquered, and usually taken prisoner, though sometimes killed.

Clemens of Alexandria describes the employments of some of the priests when he tells us which parts of the books of Thoth each undertook to learn and to repeat by heart. The Singer, who walked first in the sacred processions, bearing the symbols of music, could repeat the books of hymns and the rules for the king's life. The

p. 34

Soothsayer, who followed, carrying an hour glass, and a palm branch, the emblem of the year, could repeat the four astrological books: one on the moon's phases, one on the fixed stars, and two on their heliacal risings. The Scribe, who walked next, carrying a book and the flat rule which held the ink and pen, was acquainted with the geography of the world and of the Nile, and with those books which describe the motions of the sun, moon, and planets, and the furniture of the temple and consecrated places. The Master of the Robes carried the rod of justice, and the sacrificial vase. He understood the ten books relating to education, to the marks on the sacred heifers, and to the worship of the gods, embracing the sacrifices, the first-fruits, the



Fig. 49.--The Singer or Musician.



Fig. 50.--The Prophet or Ventriloquist.



Fig. 51.--The Scribe.



Fig. 52.--The Serpent Charmer.

hymns, the prayers, the processions, and festivals. The Prophet or Preacher, who walked last, carrying in his arms the great water-jar, was the president of the temple, and learned in the ten books, called Hieratic, relating to the laws, the gods, the management of the temples, and the revenue. Thus, of the forty-two chief books of Thoth,

p. 35

thirty-six were learned by these priests, while the remaining six, on the body, its diseases, and medicines, were learned by Pastophori, priests who carried the image of the god in a small shrine. Of these priests we know several from the sculptures and their statues. On a bas-relief in Rome, the Singer carrying the symbols of music is not a priest, but a priestess (see Fig. 49). Before her walks the Prophet, carrying the great water-jar (see Fig. 50). Before him walks the Scribe, carrying his book, which is a roll of papyrus (see Fig. 51). He has; feathers in his cap, and in the Rosetta Stone is called a Pterophoros, or *wing bearer*. The first of the four priests (Fig. 52) is a whisperer, or serpent charmer. She carries the animal on her left arm, and persuades the ignorant multitude of her sacred character by showing that she is able to handle the poisonous animal without being hurt by it. So the ignorant natives on the island of Malta thought the Apostle Paul a god when he handled a serpent without being hurt by it. That the Scribe, who walks second, was also a magician we may learn from finding his name used for such by the Jews. Hartom, *the magician*, in the Book of Daniel, is the Coptic word Erchom, *a writer*, and an Egyptian scribe in Genesis and Exodus.

The jar or bottle carried by the prophet, the third in the group, was supposed to have the power of speaking. This priest, by his skill in ventriloquism, made his hearers believe that his voice came out of it. The same speaking bottle was made use of by the Hebrew ventriloquists, who said that a familiar spirit dwelt in it. Such was used by the witch of Endor when she played upon the feelings of King Saul (see 1 Sam. xxviii., in the Hebrew).

Among the modern sculptures on the temple of Dendera, we have the Soothsayer carrying the hour-glass, which was

p. 36

not invented till long after the fall of Thebes (see Fig. 53). And on the sarcophagus of Amyrteus we have a procession of priests each carrying a palm branch (see Egypt. Inscript. Pl. 28 and 30), accompanying the priests with feathers on their heads. We have also many statues of the scribes, seated on the ground cross-legged with the roll of papyrus on the knees. Statues also of the Pastophori, or shrine-bearers, are not uncommon. They are sometimes sitting on the ground, and some times kneeling (see Fig. 54). The shrine or model of a temple usually has in front of it a small figure of the god to whom it is dedicated.



Fig. 53.

One important office of the priests was to take out the statues of the gods, on certain days of the year, in barges on the Nile (see Fig. 55). The chief boat carried the statue of Ra and the other principal gods; it was accompanied by other boats containing gods of lower rank. Horus acts

as steersman to the boat of Ra. It was part of the enactment by the priests, in honour of King Ptolemy Epiphanes, that when the statues of the gods were carried out in this sacred procession, the statue of the king should be carried out with them. The gods on this voyage were supposed to be going to visit the righteous Ethiopians, who were also, as we learn from



Fig. 54.

p. 37

Homer, visited by the Greek gods; and Iamblicus tells us that any man who should try to stop the sacred Baris, or Boat of Ra, would be little less guilty than one who should



Fig. 55.

betray the secret of Abydos, the great secret of the goddess Isis. This boat of Ra, in a lighter and smaller form, was placed upon the altar of some of the temples, and carried about on men's shoulders in the processions, with the statue of the god in it. In these processions a variety of the sacred images and emblems were carried about upon the top of poles, like so many military standards; and among them we see the image of the serpent in the manner imitated by Moses in the desert, as described in Numbers xxi. 9 (see Fig. 56).

Many were the tricks used by the priests to gain a power over the minds of their followers, and to strengthen the belief in their holiness. By means of one of these the colossal statue of Amunothph III., seated in the plain of Thebes, uttered its musical notes every morning at sunrise, when the sun's rays first touched its lips. The Septuagint tells us that ventriloquism, or the art of speaking without moving the lips, was also employed to make the bystanders fancy that a statue, or altar, or



Fig. 56.

p. 38

animal, spoke to them. They could also take up a small serpent, and by pressing the thumb on the nape of the neck throw it into a catalepsy, and make it stiff like a rod. In this state they threw it on the ground, and when, after a time, it regained its power of motion, they said that they changed a rod into a serpent. This trick was performed by the priests in the presence of Moses (see Exodus vii. 12). They interpreted dreams and foretold future events by means of a divining cup, which had a variety of superstitious figures engraved within it. We have in the British Museum an Assyrian copy of one of these Egyptian divining cups (see Fig. 57). Such may have been the cup with which Joseph divined, as mentioned in Genesis xlv. 5. In one temple there was a small window in the roof through which light could be let into a room otherwise dark; and at the proper minute this window was opened, and the

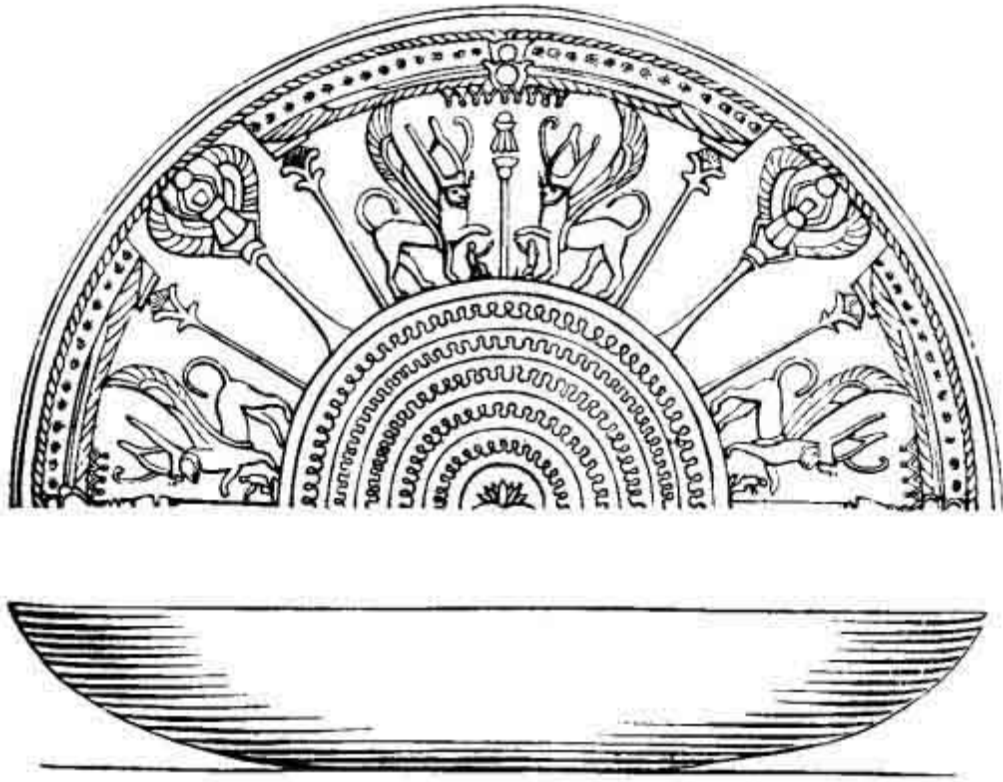


Fig. 57.

p. 39

sun's rays were allowed to enter and fall upon the face of the god's statue within.

The greater number of the priests were certainly married, and on the funereal tablets we find a man boasting of his descent through a line of priestesses, perhaps as often as through a line of priests. In the case of the married priests, their wives were priestesses, and their children belonged to the same sacred order afterwards. The priestesses were more particularly musicians to the temple service. Their favourite instrument was a sistrum, a bronze ring, with a handle, and pierced with six holes, through which were passed three bronze wires which made a jingling noise when it was shaken. The dress of the priests and priestesses was for the most part that of the laity. The priestesses wore one thin robe, reaching from the neck to the ankles, sometimes loose, but sometimes so tight that they could only take short steps in walking. The priests also wore a thin garment reaching from the shoulders to the knees, and beneath it a short apron round the loins. These were all made of linen, as indeed were the garments of every man in the country. Flax was a native of Egypt, and hence curiously arose the opinion of the neighbouring nations that linen was the clothing most suited for the priesthood. Some few, however, of the priests are represented as wearing for their clothing the spotted skin of a leopard, with the claws and tail not removed from it (see Fig. 58). The monuments show us some priests with the head wholly shaven, and we see in Gen. xli. 14, that Joseph thought it necessary to shave himself when he went before Pharaoh in the

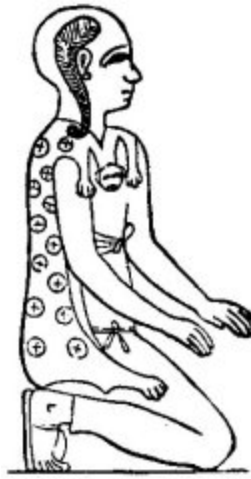


Fig. 58.

p. 40

priestly character of interpreter of dreams. In a painting on stucco in the British Museum, a priest has left a small line of hair round the shaven crown of his head, after the fashion of the tonsure, since followed by the Roman Catholics. In our Fig. 58, the priest has the single lock of hair hanging on one side of his head, which at one time was worn only by the kings' sons, and upon the statues of the youthful gods Horus and Chonso; but afterwards it became more common.

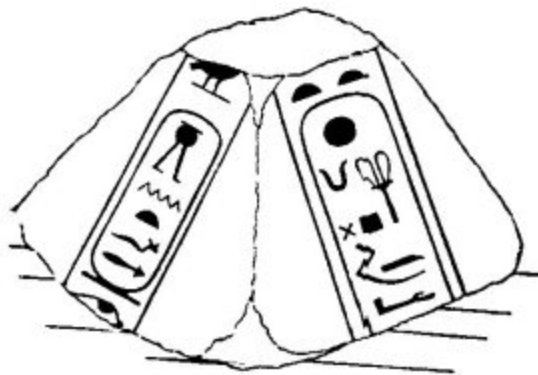


Fig. 59.--Small Votive Pyramid.

The offerings set out upon the altars for gods and ancestors were for the most part the articles of food which were eaten by the living; such as the head of a calf, the leg of a stag, a craw-fish, a loaf of bread, and various vegetables. At other times it was a cone of baked clay with a religious sentence stamped on the base, or a small stone pyramid with an inscription on each of the four sides (see Fig. 59). These were used as figurative of any gift, in consequence of the close resemblance of the words TEI, *a gift*, and TAU, *a hill*. On some occasions the priest presented fire and water to the statues of the gods as being the two purest of the elements. The water, or occasionally wine, was poured out of a tall slender jar, while a small quantity of burning charcoal was held forward in a metal ladle with a long handle to it (see Fig. 60), where we have figures of the king, the queen, and their son attending upon two priests, who are making the offerings. We

p. 41

learn from Jeremiah xlv. 18 that this charcoal fire was used to burn incense, as the Jews when living in Egypt are described as burning incense and pouring out drink offerings to the Egyptian goddess, the Queen of Heaven, after the manner of the country.

The Egyptians were accused by the Greeks and Romans of sacrificing human beings on the altars of Osiris. But it is probable that the only foundation for the charge was a custom of accompanying the beheading of criminals with a religious ceremony, in which Osiris may have been declared the judge of the living as well as of the dead. They may, perhaps, have also had a custom of putting to death the criminals on days sacred to that god. Some such custom



Fig. 60.

p. 42

was followed by the Jews, and even by the Roman governors of Judea; as we learn from the Gospels that at the Passover, when the Saviour was crucified, there were three criminals, a murderer and two robbers, waiting in prison to be put to death at the same feast.

The religious character of the Ancient Egyptians shows itself to us even at the present day, after so many centuries, in a most marked manner, by the costly way in which they made the bodies into mummies by embalmment, and by the costly tombs in which they then laid them to await the day of resurrection. Their tombs were built with more care than their houses; the tombs of their kings were often larger and more ornamented than the temples and palaces. The tombs of the kings and high priests of Memphis are huge pyramids, standing upon the western hills, which divide the cultivated land from the desert. In the middle of each is a small chamber, in which was placed the

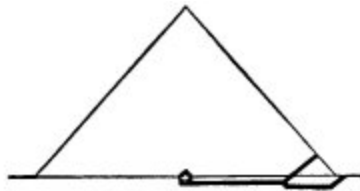


Fig. 61.

embalmed body enclosed in a massive granite sarcophagus (see Fig. 61). The pyramid takes its name from the words Pi-Rama, *The Mountain*; and the Arabs, changing the Coptic article for their own, still call it by the same name, Ar-Rama. Those which are built of stone remain, and two of them are the largest, and probably the oldest buildings in the world. Those which were built of unburnt

p. 43

bricks have crumbled away in the last three thousand years into a heap of rubbish. In Thebes, on the other hand, where the western hills are of a limestone particularly well suited for caverns, the tombs are chambers hollowed out of the hill side, beautifully sculptured and painted within, but with entrance so covered up with the soil as to escape the notice of even the most curious eyes. The Theban kings were buried in a valley set apart for kings' tombs only, and their queens were buried in another valley, with the entrances equally concealed in the earth. The kings of Memphis meant to save their embalmed bodies from being disturbed by the strength of the stone work in which they were encased, and the kings of Thebes by means of the care with which the entrance to the tomb was concealed. In both neighbourhoods the tombs were made in the desert, beyond the limits of the Nile's overflow, and thus beyond the cultivated fields, as in places where the mummies were least likely to decay or be disturbed. Job, who everywhere shows an acquaintance with Egyptian civilisation, in chapter iii. 14, says that the kings and counsellors of the earth built for themselves tombs in the desert; and it was after Plato had travelled in Egypt that he proposed in his *Book on Laws* that no human body should be buried in any spot which could be cultivated.

In Fig. 62 we have the ground plan and the vertical section of the tomb of king Oimenephah I., in the valley of kings' tombs at Thebes. When the entrance had been discovered, and eighteen feet of earth had been removed by the enterprising Belzoni, he descended through staircases and passages for about 120 feet further, till he arrived at a pit or dry well, which was thirteen feet across, and thirty feet deep, marked A in our plan.

p. 44

This was meant not only to bar an intruder's further progress, but to deceive him with the appearance of its being the end of the cavern. Our discoverer, however, made a bridge across this pit, and broke an opening through the wall on the opposite side, and by this he entered the chamber marked B, and then into the chamber marked C. Then returning into the chamber marked B, he descended through a flight of stairs and a passage till he reached the principal chamber, out of which five smaller chambers open. The further half of this principal chamber is vaulted, and under that vault stood the Alabaster Sarcophagus, formed to hold the body of the king, which was no doubt embalmed and placed within a first and second wooden mummy case. But the Sarcophagus had been broken open, and its contents rifled, probably centuries before our discoverer had reached it. It therefore still remains doubtful whether the king was really buried with it; for under the sarcophagus was found a staircase descending three hundred feet further, and there closed by rubbish, so that it is at least possible that the king's embalmed body may be yet lying safely within a second sarcophagus, still deeper and further beneath the Theban hills.

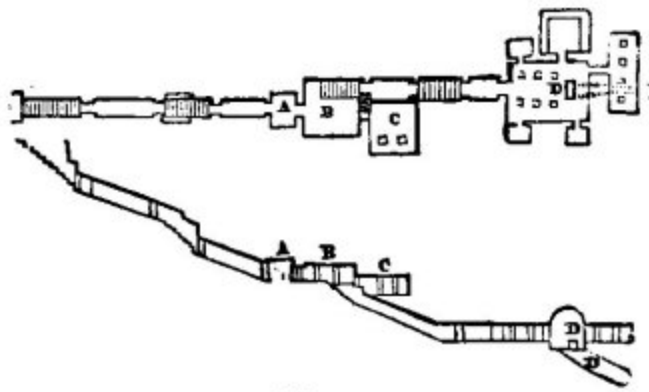


Fig. 62.

Such was the care taken by a great king to save his earthly body unhurt and undisturbed against the day of resurrection. Equally costly and laboured were the painted sculptures against the walls of these beautiful

p. 45

passages and chambers. The king's soul is represented in the form of a crowned vulture with outstretched wings, and two sceptres, each an ostrich feather, in its claws. It has the king's name and titles written over it. In other sculptures the soul is a bird with a human head, as in Fig. 29 and Fig. 73. There are also several groups of figures each representing the king embracing a god, placing his right arm in a loving manner round the god's neck (see Fig. 63). These are important, because unusual. Before the Christian era, few beside the Hebrew prophets had ever taught men that the god whom they feared deserved also to be loved. Most pagan nations have boasted that they were beloved by their gods; but here the Theban king, with a more religious feeling, professes his love for the god Osiris, in return. The same feeling is shown in the name of his son Rameses II., who, though usually styled Amun-mai, or *Beloved by Amun*, is sometimes called Mi-amun, or *Lover of Amun*. Hence it would seem that the religion of the Egyptians--or, at least, of the people of Upper Egypt--was better than that of other Pagans.



Fig. 63.

The serpent of evil, the great enemy of the human race, plays an important part in all pictures and sculptures relating to the next world. If its numerous spiral folds were made straight, it would sometimes be an hundred and

p. 46

fifty feet long. When we see it in the water, with a number of women around it on the river's banks, we are reminded of the Greek fable of the serpent in the garden with the daughters of Hesperus; when it is pierced through the head by the spear of the goddess Isis, we see the enmity between the woman and the serpent spoken of in Genesis, chap. iii. It is always conquered by the good, sometimes pierced through its folds by a number of swords, and sometimes carried away alive in the arms of its conquerors in triumph, as in Fig. 64.

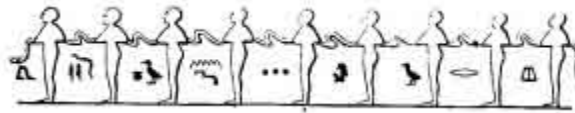


Fig. 64.

The wish for immortality, or a life hereafter, and the belief that it could be obtained with the help of this earthly body, and not without it, led the Egyptians to give as much care to embalming it before burial as to building its tomb. But the completeness of the embalment, like the size and strength of the tomb, varied with the importance of the dead person and the wealth of his family. Kings and High Priests were often buried in a stone sarcophagus, which contained a first and then a second inner mummy case, both made of wood. The two inner cases were usually shaped to the body, as also was, sometimes the stone sarcophagus. Some bodies were buried in only two cases, and some in only one. Sometimes all three cases were of wood, as in Fig. 65, where the two inner cases are shaped to the body, with heads and faces carved and painted, while the third and outer case is a chest with straight sides and arched top. Such a mummy case as this was meant to lie flat on the ground, but when

p. 47

the outer case, whether a first, second, or third, was shaped to the body, it was sometimes placed upon its feet upright against the wall. We learn from the arrangement of the sculpture on the outer case whether it was meant to stand up or to lie down. The inscriptions on these cases usually declare the pedigree of the deceased person through two, three, or four generations, and add a variety of religious sentences in honour of the several gods, whose figures are there painted or sculptured, and tell us that he was



Fig. 65.

a righteous good man, now changed into the god Osiris, and immortal. He holds in his hands the two sceptres of that god. The mummies of women are perhaps as common as those of men; and the rank of both is usually priestly. The mummies of children are rare; if many were made, they have probably long since gone to decay, together with those of the humbler classes of society, as having received a less costly and less careful embalmment. On the mummy, and within the bandages, were laid small ornaments as charms, in the form of scarabæi, eyes, hearts,

p. 48

fingers, nilometer land-marks, necklaces, and sometimes on each part of the body the image of the god who acted as guardian over that part. Within the mummy case was often laid a roll of papyrus, containing an account of the events which will befall the deceased in the next world, in his passage through trials and difficulties to a state of final bliss.

The manner of embalming varied with the sum of money spent upon it. The body was opened with as little cutting and injury as possible, and the less solid parts were removed. The brain was taken out through the nostrils. When the greatest care was employed, the body was thoroughly soaked for several weeks in a mineral pitch, called Mum in the hieroglyphics; and hence our word mummy. It was then wrapped round with several hundred yards of narrow linen bandages, which were more



Fig. 66.

or less soaked in the same pitch, and it was not placed within its painted wooden mummy case till the pitch was thoroughly dry. Seventy days were allowed for the time of mourning between the death and burial, of which a large part was spent upon the embalming. But as the whole time could not have been long enough for painting the wooden mummy cases, and engraving the sculptures on the sarcophagus, these costly works must have been begun long before the death. The Egyptians spent forty

days in embalming the patriarch Jacob, and mourned for him the usual time of seventy days (see Genesis 1. 3) The softer and more moist parts of the body were some of them placed in four earthen jars, called Canobic jars, either from the city of Canopus, or from the name of the god Kneph or Cenubis. These jars have lids in the shape of the heads of a man, an ape, a jackal, and a hawk (see Fig. 66). They represent the four lesser gods of the dead, and their names seem to describe the different operations in mummy-making over which they watched. Amset, *the carpenter*, has a man's head; Hefi, *the digger*, has an ape's head; Smotef, *the shaper*, has a jackal's head; and Snouf, *the bleeder*, has a hawk's head. But the heads of the two last are sometimes changed one for another, and sometimes, in the place of Smotef, we have Sottef, *the cutter or purifier*.



Fig. 67.

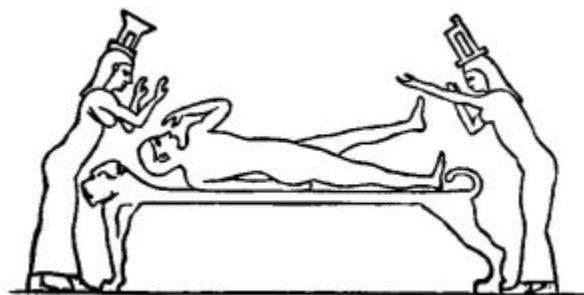


Fig. 68.

The goddess Isis and Nephthys were more particularly supposed to grieve at every man's death (see Fig. 67), and the god Anubis to assist in laying out the mummy. It was always placed on a lion-shaped couch (see Fig. 68). When placed in the mummy-case, as the death may have taken place on the east side of the Nile, while the burial places were usually on the west side, the ferrying it across the river was an important part of

the funeral Ceremony. It thus crossed the stream which divided life from death, and entered the region of Amenti, the abode of the dead. If the death took place on the west side of the river, the same procession by water was conducted across the small lake or large tank, which belonged to the temple. It was not unusual to have a small model of this sacred tank, with its flights of steps leading down to the water, cut in stone, to be used as a basin for the libations in the temple (see Fig. 69). When

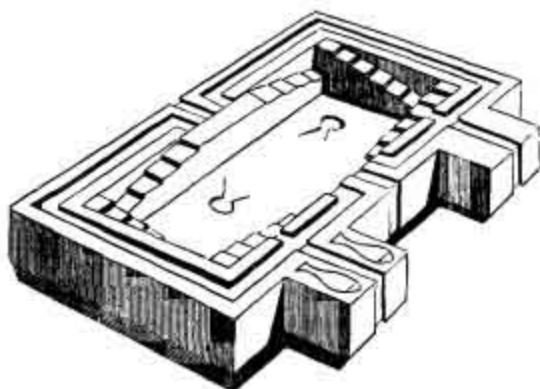


Fig. 69.

the mummy of the dead man had been ferried across the water, the next ceremony was his trial before the judge Osiris.

That solemn trial of every man for his conduct in this life, which was to fix his reward or punishment in the next, is one of the most interesting of the pictures on the funereal papyri, and was enacted by the priests as part of the funeral ceremony (see Fig. 70). They put on masks distinctive of the several gods, and thus received the body in due form. Osiris sat on a raised throne, holding his two sceptres, and wearing the crown of Upper Egypt. Before him were placed the offerings, and near him were

p. 51

seated the four lesser gods of the dead. The deceased holds up his hands in prayer, and is introduced by two goddesses, each wearing on her head the emblem of truth. The wicked Typhon, as an hippopotamus, the Cerberus of the Greeks, accuses him to the judge, and demands that he shall be punished; while the four lesser gods of the dead intercede as advocates or mediators on his behalf. But a large pair of scales is set up, which is quietly adjusted by the dog-headed Anubis and the hawk-headed Horus. In one scale is placed the heart or conduct of the deceased, and in the other a figure of the goddess of truth. A small weight is moved along the beam by Horus, to make the two scales balance, and to determine how much the conduct falls short of the standard weight. Forty-two assessors are at hand to assist Osiris in forming his judgment, and each declares the deceased man's innocence of that particular crime of which that assessor takes notice. The judgment, when pronounced, is written down by the ibis-headed Thoth, as recording angel, or god of writing. Thus are measured the godness and the failings of the

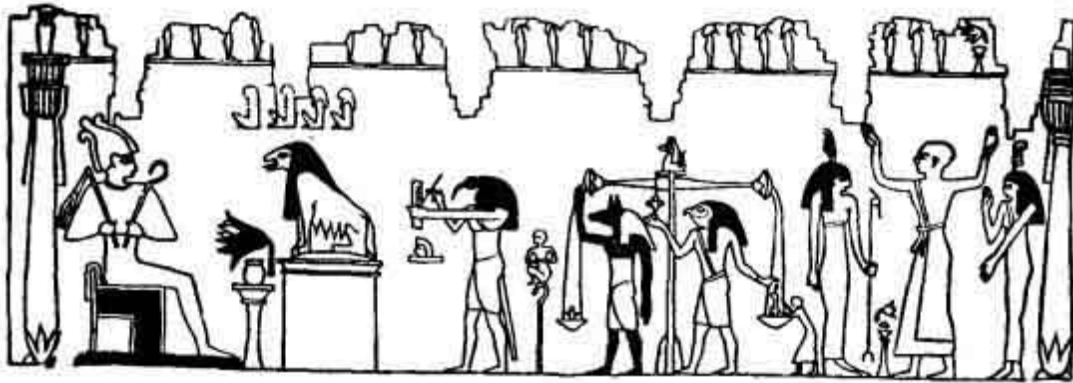


Fig. 70.

p. 52

life lately ended. Those who were too uncultivated to listen to a sermon might thus learn wisdom from what they saw with their eyes, and this ceremony was a forcible method of teaching the ignorant multitude that a day of judgment awaits us all after death, and that we should so regulate our lives that, when weighed in the great balance, they may not be found wanting.

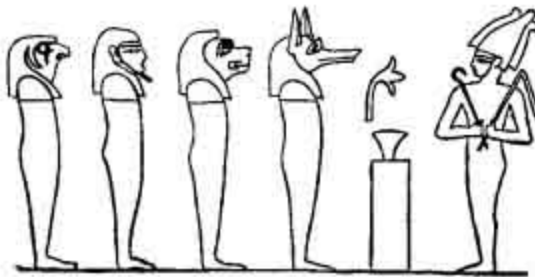


Fig. 71.

But notwithstanding this show of a trial, and this ceremony of the great scales, the Egyptians, like other Pagan nations, had very little trust in the justice of the judge, and to bribe him, and to appease his wrath, they prudently brought their sin-offerings, which in our figure lie upon the altar in the form of a Lotus flower. The same offerings are laid before the assessors in the hope that they also may thereby be persuaded to return favourable answers to the questions that the judge may put to them. Again the four lesser gods, who come forward as the friends and advocates of the trembling sinner, may be seen at the head of a tablet in the British Museum, strengthening their mediation on his behalf by

laying their own gifts upon the altar before Osiris (see Fig. 71). On other tablets we see other gods joining him in his prayers as his advocates, and making their offerings jointly with him. Nor was this always thought enough to obtain from the judge a verdict in favour of the deceased. The greater the sacrifice, the greater would be the chance of a favourable verdict. Accordingly, the four lesser gods are themselves supposed

p. 53

to offer themselves as an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the sinner; and on a funeral tablet in the British Museum, dated in 62nd year of Rameses II., we see the deceased has placed them on the altar before Osiris, as his sin offering (See Fig. 72).



Fig. 72.

The resurrection of the dead to a second life had been a deep-rooted religious opinion among the Egyptians from the earliest times. They told Herodotus that when the soul left its own body, it took up its abode in the bodies of other animals, and was there imprisoned during a number of other short lives; and thus, after passing for three thousand years through the bodies of birds, beasts, and fishes, it was again allowed to return into its old dwelling. Among the sculptures on the sarcophagus of Oimenepthah II., we see the human race mounting the steps of a lofty throne, on which is seated the judge Osiris, with the great scales before him, and the soul of one unhappy man, who has been found guilty, has been lodged in the body of a pig, as the representative of impurity, and in that form is carried away in a boat by the god Anubis from the presence of the judge (see Fig. on page 58). On the other hand, on a papyrus in the British Museum we see a painting of the mummy of a good man placed inside the body of a ram, the animal sacred to the god Kneph, and thus the proper dwelling place for goodness.

The figures on the ornamental mummy cases abundantly prove to us that the reason for saving the body from decay,

p. 54

by embalming it as a mummy, was, that it might be ready for the soul to re-enter when the years of wandering were at an end. The painting represents the mummy lying on its lion-shaped couch, with the soul returning to it, in the form of a bird with human head, and putting back life and breath into its mouth, while the god Anubis is preparing to unwrap the bandages (see Fig. 73). The character for life is a key, in the form of a



Fig. 73.

cross with a ring at the top that for breath is the mast and sail of a ship, which naturally remind us of wind. It was only at a late time, perhaps not till after their intercourse with the Greeks, that some few of the Egyptians entertained the opinion of a spiritual resurrection, without the help of the dead body. They show this opinion in the painting by giving to a man at the moment of his death two bodies, the one



Fig. 74.

earthly and mortal, and the other angelic and immortal (see Fig. 74). The vault of heaven is represented by the outstretched figure of the goddess Neith, painted blue. On each side sits a figure of the ram-headed Kneph,

p. 55

holding the feather, the character for Truth, to show that the dead man is righteous, or has been acquitted by the judge Osiris. In the middle is the earthly body, painted red, falling to the ground in death, while the heavenly body, painted blue, stands upright and holds up his hands in the attitude of prayer. This picture describes the opinion of the Apostle Paul, who says, in 1 Corinth. xv. 44, "There is an animal body and there is a spiritual body." But this more spiritual view of the resurrection to a future life was never generally received by the Egyptians. They clung to the old opinion of the resurrection of the body, and continued to make it into a mummy to save it for the return of the soul. The two opinions are both spoken of in Acts xxiii. 8, where we read that the Sadduces say there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge both.

Within the family tomb were placed against the wall the sculptured and painted funereal tablets or tombstones of the persons buried there. In the best days of Thebes the funereal tablet was usually headed with the winged sun, and had a date telling us in what day of the month, and in what year of the king's reign, it was set up. Beneath this we see the deceased on his knees presenting his offerings to those gods to whom he was more particularly attached. To every god is given his name and titles. The row is, perhaps, headed by Amun-Ra, as king of the gods, or, perhaps, by Osiris, the judge of the dead. Below this the deceased is making the same offerings to his ancestors, to each of whom is given his

name, and relationship, and titles, which are usually priestly. Then follow several lines of hieroglyphical writing, declaring that the tablet is dedicated to the above gods, in honour of the deceased, to whom is given his titles and pedigree through a line of

p. 56

priests and priestesses, and adding a boastful account of his gifts to the temple of oxen, geese, wine, oil, milk, money, and other valuables. On the earliest tablets the deceased is not worshipping the gods, but is himself receiving homage from his own children, who show their piety by setting out a table of food for his use after his death.

Various were the opinions among the priests about a good man's employments and pleasures after death. Some painted him on the papyrus, which was buried with him, as busy ploughing with oxen and sowing his seed in a field well watered with canals, and that needed no pumping. Others made him lie in easy idleness by the side of his water-tank, enjoying the wished-for coolness and freedom from thirst. Some painted him on the wall of his tomb seated, with his staff of inheritance in his hand, while his servants are counting out before him his wealth in cattle and corn, and while his guests are feasting, with women servants handing wine to them, and others entertaining them with music. Some buried him with the prayer that he might be able to get the



Fig. 75.

better of his enemies when he met them in the next world, and showed him sitting in pride with those unhappy men, who might have before offended him, now in bonds beneath his chair; or they painted on the mummy case the same enemies with

p. 57

their arms tied behind them under the soles of his feet to be trampled on (see Fig. [75](#)).

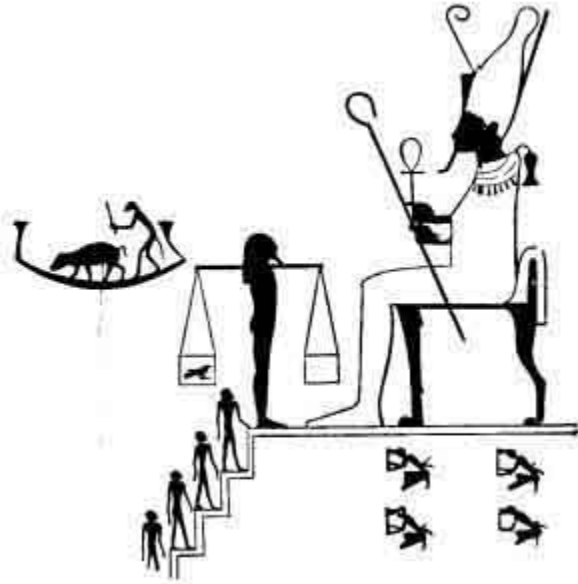
Many of these opinions about the resurrection and a future state of rewards and punishments were borrowed by the Greeks directly from Egypt, as we see by the Egyptian names which they took with the opinions. Thus Rro-t-amenti, or *King of Hell*, the title of Osiris, gave a name to Rhadamanthus, the Greek judge of the dead. Menes, the fabulous founder of the Egyptian monarchy, became Minos, a second judge of the dead. From the word Charo, *silent*, the boatman of Greek mythology, who ferried the dead into the next world, was called Charon, and the river which he crossed was called Acheron. Hecate, *the sorceress*, one of the titles of Isis, was given by the Greeks and Romans as a name to their queen of Hell. The hippopotamus who stands before Osiris, when he is judging the dead in Fig. [70](#), [p. 51](#), is one of the Cabeiri gods, and became among the Greeks, with but little change in figure and name, the dog Cerberus. The goddess Thmei, or *truth*, with the ostrich head in the same figure, became the Greek Themis, or goddess of justice. Those who are less in earnest are usually led in their opinions by the more grave and serious. Herodotus tells us that though he did not believe much that was told him, on these matters, yet that he thought them too serious to relate in his book. And thus the Greeks, as soon as Egypt was open to them by the rise of a race of kings at Sais, who favoured Greek intercourse, readily copied the more solemn of the Egyptian superstitions.

Among the Jews, on the other hand, these views of a life after death were very little accepted; we find very few traces in the Hebrew writings

of a belief in a future state. Possibly the grossness of the Egyptian opinions may have

p. 58

led the Hebrew Law-givers to reject them altogether, rather than to attempt to purify them; in the same way that the Roman Catholic opinions about purgatory made the Protestants for a time refuse to believe that the Almighty's punishments could be meant to reform the criminal.



[Next: The Religion of Lower Egypt.](#)

THE RELIGION OF LOWER EGYPT.



Fig. 76

AFTER the fall of Thebes, after the conquest of Egypt by the Ethiopians, and after the disorders which followed thereupon, we find in about the year B.C. 700, a race of kings, who made Sais in the Delta their capital, sovereigns of all Egypt. After their rise, we note a considerable change in the Egyptian religion as it appears upon the more modern monuments. This may have arisen from any or all of three causes. First, during the late troublous centuries, while fewer monuments were made, the religion of the nation may have been slowly undergoing a change, which now at length shows itself on the monuments. Or, secondly, as frailer records, such as wooden mummy cases and the papyri inclosed therein, have been saved to us in greater numbers, from these more modern times, while the older Theban records are mostly sculptures on the stone walls, it is very possible that a different class of sentiments may be thereby shown to us. Or, thirdly, the people of Lower Egypt, having always been somewhat of a different race from those of Upper Egypt, may have always had in many points a different religious opinion.

The western half of the Delta had received a considerable colony of Greek traders, and hence arose a mixed population, half Egyptian and half Greek; and in the eastern half of the Delta there was a yet larger number of Jewish and Phœnician (*sic*) settlers, from the latter of whom sprung a population half Egyptian and half Phœnician. Naucratis in the west was wholly a Greek city, and Sais, the western capital, was very much under Greek influence. On the other side, Isaiah tells us that there were as many as five cities on the Pelusiatic, or eastern branch of the Nile, where Hebrew was the language spoken in the streets. Pelusium was wholly peopled by Phœnician sailors, and so numerous were they in Memphis, that one part of the city was called the Tyrian quarter. Though the Greeks introduced many new arts into Egypt, they probably brought about no change in the religion; in religious matters they were always happy to learn from the Egyptians. Far otherwise was the case with the Phœnicians; and many of the gods worshipped at Memphis were considered by Herodotus (*sic*) to be Phœnician deities. Hence it is probable that the religion of Lower Egypt was largely covered with Phœnician opinions. At any rate, from whichever of the above causes it arose, we now find more frequent and stronger proofs that the gods were worshipped in fear rather than in love; that the sacrifices were made less than they used to be in thankfulness for blessings received, and more often than formerly, as an atonement to turn aside punishment that is dreaded. Pthah, the great god of Memphis, is now an ugly dwarf, with an enlarged head (see Fig. [77](#)), and he sometimes holds a club over his head, as if in the act of threatening his worshippers with vengeance (see Fig. [78](#)). He is the father of a brood of children as ugly and malicious as himself. These are the Cabeiri, whose office

it was to torture the wicked who may be found guilty by Osiris at the great trial on the day of judgment. Their name is derived from the Egyptian word KBA, *punishment*, and IRI, *to do*, Osiris, *the judge*, from OSH, *a decree*, and IRI, *to do*. As we have before mentioned, Typhon, the hippopotamus, the accuser in the trial-scene, page [51](#), was one of them. For the purpose of torturing their victims, they are armed with swords, snakes, and lizards, as in Fig. [79](#), where they accompany their father Pthah, with his enlarged head.

to be appeased with gifts. Herodotus tells us that these Cabeiri were more particularly the gods of the Phenician settlements in the Delta; but from the papyri we learn that their worship was common to all the natives of

p. 63

Lower Egypt. The Cynocephalus, or dog-faced monkey, plays an important part in the world below, and among the spirits of the dead. Four of these usually guard the bottomless pit of hell fire, sitting one at each corner of it, as in Fig. 79. On the papyri they join the souls of the departed in worshipping the sun, when on its journey under ground, after sinking into the arms of the ocean; and when they accompany the boa' of Ra, as on the tablet (Egypt Inscript., pl. 46), we must suppose that the god is then on its midnight passage through the valley of the shadow of death.

Another Phenician deity is the foreign Venus, chiefly worshipped at Memphis, who, unlike the Egyptian goddesses, is wholly unclothed. She is Athor under a new form, having her long hair falling in two locks on her shoulders, and having a basket on her head (see Fig. 81). She shows us a front view, and stands upon a lion that walks side-ways. She stands between two gods, each on the top of a small temple with a door. One is the Egyptian Chem, who, with his right arm raised, holds the whip. The other is a foreign god, with an Asiatic beard: he holds a spear in his right hand, and the character for life in his left hand. In place of the sacred Asp, the usual ornament of a god's forehead, he has a dog's or stag's head with two long ears, like that on the top of an Anubis-staff. The name of the goddess is Koun, the queen of Heaven; the name of the foreign god is Ranpo, Lord of Heaven, and king of the other gods. To Chem, the goddess presents a bunch of flowers, emblems of life, and to the foreign god two serpents, emblems of death, thus declaring the Gnostic and Manichean doctrine of Antitheses or oppositions between life and death, or good and evil, a doctrine of which we see many more traces in

p. 64

Lower Egypt than in the Thebaid. The goddess Koun, or Chiun, is mentioned by the prophet Amos, in chap. v. 26, where the Greek translators in the Septuagint version have changed her name into Raephan, which in Acts vii. 43 is spelled Remphan; and thus by a strange change we have these two Phenician deities. both mentioned in the same sentence. This god Ranpo is sculptured on other Egyptian monuments, with spear and shield in one hand, and a battle-axe in the other, with which he is prepared to strike down his terrified worshippers.

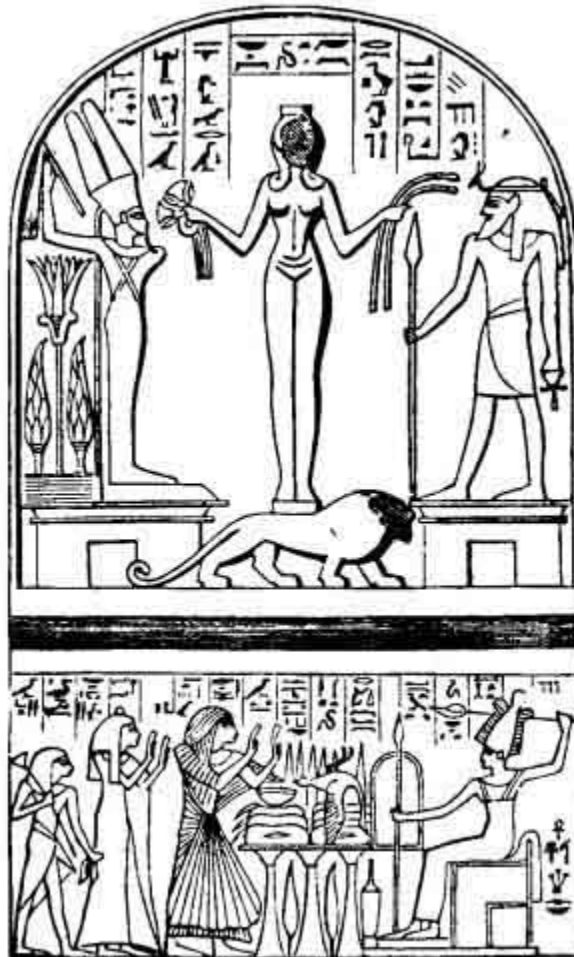


Fig. 81.

The cherubs that guarded the entrance of the garden of Eden, with flaming swords which turned on every side (Genesis iii. 24.), were perhaps copied from these Cabeiri; but we must not class with these enemies of man the cherubs which ornamented the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple (2 Chron. v. 8).

The goddess Anaita, who is mentioned by Strabo as a

p. 65

Persian goddess, was another divinity, whom the people of Memphis supplicated to withhold her punishments. She wears the crown of Osiris, and at the bottom of the tablet, Fig. 81, p. 64, she is threatening to destroy with her battleaxe the worshippers who have covered her altar with their various offerings. But the human mind, when it has created for itself so much to be feared, by a natural effort creates for itself also a protector. At Sais, this protector was the goddess Neith, to whom the worshipper turned in love and hope, when he had frightened himself with the belief that even the hated Typhon might take the place of his judge, and that Anaita and Ranpo were waiting to attack him, and the Cabeiri to torture him and thrust him into the pit of fire. Every king of Sais professed that he was beloved by Neith, as the kings of Thebes said they were beloved by Amun-Ra. The people of Lower Egypt lived under the shadow of her wings (see Fig. 76, page 59), as the people of Upper Egypt lived under the winged sun (see Fig. 1, page 1).

Thus we see that in Lower Egypt the priests taught far less worthy views of their gods than had been formerly held in Upper Egypt; and it is of the first importance to remark that the worse religion belonged to the less civilised people. Love for the gods had been held by the freer and nobler race of Thebans, while fear alone was felt by the more slavish race in the Delta. The greater ignorance which led them to see no cause for gratitude towards those beings which they fancied were the rulers of the world, and authors of their lives, may be traced even in the lessened excellence of the sculpture.

It is to the later times of Egyptian history--perhaps to the five centuries immediately before the Christian era--that the religious opinions contained in the funereal papyri

p. 66

chiefly belong. The roll of papyrus buried with the mummy often describes the funeral, and then goes on to, the return of the soul to the body, the resurrection, the various trials and difficulties which the deceased will meet and overcome in the next world, and the Garden of Paradise in which he awaits the day, of judgment, the trial on that day; and it then shows the punishment which would have awaited him if he had been found guilty. The papyrus is five, ten, twenty, or even sixty feet in length. It is divided into chapters of hieratic writing, each headed with a picture. First, we see the grief for his death. The men hold up their hands in prayer, the women throw dust upon their heads, and all beat their breasts. The mummy is placed in a boat and ferried across the sacred lake. The goddesses Isis and Nephthys, in the boat with it, hang over it in grief. The procession moves forward to the temple, in front of which stand two obelisks. The priests carry a variety of standards, each an image of a god on a pole, and lead with them an animal for the sacrifice. In front of the temple a bountiful offering is made of food, birds, beasts, fishes, fruits, bread, and wine.. There the mummy is received with the honours due to such costly gifts, and is placed in its tomb, by the side of which stands the tombstone. Then begin the events of the next life, in a series of four pictures. In the first, the deceased, in the boat of Ra, on his knees before the threefold Horus, presents his offerings to these gods. In the second, he joins his wife in worshipping the sun, which is shown to be in its place in the heavens by the rays of light which it sheds upon the worshippers. In the third, the sun sheds no rays; it is beneath the earth in its passage from the place of setting to the place of its rising. It is upheld by a figure of the ocean, and is worshipped by, the

p. 67

souls of the deceased and his wife in the form of birds, and by four apes, the usual inhabitants of hell. In the fourth picture a priest presents to him and his wife fire and water, as divine honours. Before his journey forward he addresses his prayers to the various gods, and then enters upon his labours. He attacks with spear in hand the crocodiles, lizards, scorpions, and snakes which beset his path, and passing through these dark regions he at length reaches the land of Amenti, whose goddess is a hawk standing upon a perch. Here the sun's rays cheer his steps, and he meets among other wonders the head of Horus rising out of a Lotus flower, the god Pthah, the phoenix, his own soul in the form of a bird with human head, and the goddess Isis as a serpent of goodness. The soul then returns to the mummy, and puts life into its mouth. He then enters upon his farm, floating upon one of the canals in a boat, and passing by the landmark at its boundary. In this farm he ploughs, he sows the seed, he reaps the corn, and presents his offerings to the god of the Nile who fills the canals with water. Then follow his prayers to numerous gods and temples. At length arrives the day of judgment, and he is brought before the god Osiris and his forty-two assessors, to

have his conduct weighed in the great scales, as described in page [51](#). After the trial we are shown the lake of fire into which the wicked are to be thrown (see page [72](#)), and the gods of punishment, the Cabeiri, with swords in their hands (see Fig. [79](#)). These, however, do him no injury, they are in his case overcome, and each safely imprisoned in a cell under ground, or under the river Nile.

Sometimes the tree of life, with the goddess Neith in its branches, is one of the trees in the paradise which the deceased enters. Sometimes he only reaches this happy

p. 68

land after his trial and acquittal, instead of being allowed to wait there until the day of judgment. Sometimes we see more of the punishment of the wicked, their heads are hanging from posts, their bodies imprisoned in caves, or they are awaiting their punishment with their arms tied behind them. Some papyri explain the transmigration of souls, as before mentioned, and show us the good man within the body of a ram, and the wicked man driven away in the form of a pig. (See Papyri in the British Museum.)

The favourable verdicts of the assessors explain to us that in the Egyptian religion, Osiris, like an earthly judge, (does not require any virtuous acts of the deceased, but only inquires whether he has broken any of the forty-two commandments, and committed any of the forty-two sins therein forbidden. A man was thought virtuous and good if he had avoided forbidden sin. The code of morals had not yet risen so high as to require active goodness of any man.

The religious earnestness of the Egyptians was unfortunately accompanied with the same fault that it carries with it in modern times--namely, religious intolerance, from which Greeks and Romans were far more free. The people of Marea and Apis, on the banks of the Lake Mareotis, who were Libyians, and did not hold the religious opinions of the Egyptians, saw nothing wicked in eating beef, and did not like to be forbidden to kill a cow in their own cities. They pleaded that they were not Egyptians. But they could obtain no religious toleration from their rulers; they might kill and eat buffaloes, whether male or female, but they were not allowed to keep cows for their own eating, because in drinking out of their lake they drank the sacred waters of the Nile. In some cases the Egyptians seem to have wished even to force their religion upon

p. 69

unwilling neighbours. When king Shishank had defeated Rehoboam, King of Judah, and made Jeroboam king of the northern tribes of Israel, it would seem that the golden calves set up by both sovereigns were acts of homage to the Egyptian conqueror. The spread of the emblems of Egyptian religion in Etruria, and in the islands of Cyprus, Malta, and Sardinia, must be owing to the peaceable intercourse by trade, through the vessels of the Phenicians, rather than to any act of violence; and, indeed, it was again and again remarked by the Greeks, that such was the serious nature of the Egyptian superstitions, that they conquered and put down every other superstition that they came near.

The Egyptian's opinion of the creation was the growth of his own river's bank. The thoughtful man, who saw the Nile every year lay a body of solid manure upon his field, was able to measure against the walls of the old temples that the ground was slowly but certainly rising. An increase of the earth was being brought about by the river. Hence he readily believed that the world itself had of old been formed "out of water, and by means of water," as described in 2 Peter iii. 5. The philosophers were nearly of the same opinion. They held that matter was itself eternal, like the other gods, and that our world, in the beginning, before it took any shape upon itself, was like thin mud, or a mass of water containing all things that were afterwards to be brought forth out of it. When the water had by its divine will separated itself from the earth, then the great Ra, the sun, sent down his quickening heat, and plants and animals came forth out of the wet land, as the insects are spawned out of the fields, before the eyes of the husbandman, every autumn after the Nile's overflow has retreated. The crafty priests of the Nile,

p. 70

who had lived in confinement as Monks, declared that they had themselves visited and dwelt in the caverns beneath the river, where these treasures, while yet unshaped, were kept in store and waiting to come into being. And on the days sacred to the Nile, boys, the children of priestly families, were every year dedicated to the blue river-god that they might spend their youth in monastic retirement, and as it was said, in these caverns beneath his waves.



Fig. 82.

That some of these were very early Egyptian opinions we learn from our finding traces of them in the oldest of the Hebrew Scriptures, though the writers there are not so far warped by them as to rob the Creator of the praise for his own works. The author of the book of Genesis tells us that the Almighty formed our earth and its inhabitants by dividing the land from the water, and then commanding them both to bring forth living creatures; and again one of the Psalmists says that his substance, while yet imperfect, was by the Creator curiously wrought in the lowest depths of the earth. The Hebrew writer, however, is never misled, so far as to think that any part of the creation was its own creator. But in the Egyptian philosophy sunshine and the river Nile are themselves the divine agents; and hence fire and water received divine honours, as the two purest of the elements, and every day when the temple of Serapis in Alexandria was opened, the singer standing on the steps of the portico sprinkled water over the marble floor while he held forth fire to the people (see Fig. 82), and though he and most of his hearers were

p. 71

Greeks, he called upon the god in the Egyptian language. A vase of water, or sometimes of wine, and metal cup containing a small charcoal fire, were often presented to the altar, as figurative of divine honours (see Fig. 60).

The waters were also thought to be peopled by some kind of ghosts or spiritual beings, and we see them represented among the sculptures on the sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I. (see Fig. 82a). They are in the form of men, but

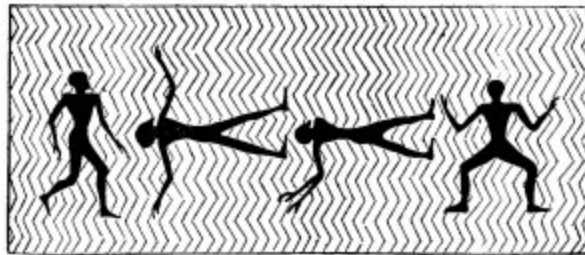


Fig. 82a.

whether they were thought at any time to come out of the water and walk the earth does not appear. That they were natives of the water, and not new comers, we learn from the Book of Job, which is full of Egyptian opinions. We there read in the Hebrew, ch. xxvi. 5, that these "Ghosts are born beneath the waters, and are the inhabitants thereof."

The sarcophagus of Oimeneptah represents the earth as a round plain, encircled by the body of Osiris, and floating in the ocean, while the goddess Neith, the heavens, stands upon the head of Osiris to increase the height, and thus holds up the sun.

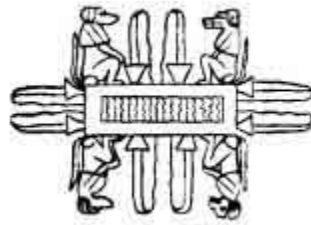
At the same time a large figure of the ocean rises out of the water, and holds up with his two hands the boat of Ra, in which the sun is carried. This opinion about

p. 72

the form of the earth was also held by the Hebrew writers, and in Proverbs viii. 27, we read in the Hebrew that wisdom was present "when

God fixed the arch upon the face of the deep"; and through those waters under the earth the Egyptians, like most other ancient people, believed that the sun passed during the hours of night.

Among the Egyptian festivals was one called the Feast of Lamps, when upon a night in winter the houses and temples were lighted up with numerous lights. This was more particularly celebrated at Sais, in honour of the goddess Neith; but those who could not come up to that city to keep the festival burnt their own lamps at home (Herodotus ii. 62). The Jews seem to have borrowed this festival. It was the first that Judas Maccabæus had an opportunity of celebrating in the Temple after he had gained possession of Jerusalem. It was the festival with which he recommenced the Temple service in the year B.C. 164., after it had been interrupted; and hence the Feast of Candles was more often called the Feast of Dedication (Josephus, Antiq. xii. 7). The Christians would seem to have taken the custom from the Egyptians as much as from the Jews, as the purpose of our Candlemas day, which is to commemorate the purification of the Virgin Mary, more resembles the worship of the goddess Neith than the purification of the Temple by Judas Maccabæus.



Pit of Fire.

[Next: The Religion Under the Persian Conquerors.](#)

THE RELIGION UNDER THE PERSIAN CONQUERORS.

THE Persians, on their conquest of Egypt, in the year B.C. 523, began with insulting the Egyptians in their religious feelings, by killing the bull Apis, and by breaking to pieces the statues of the gods. They afterwards made an earnest attempt to bring about some changes in the religion, and the chief was to abolish the worship of all statues and figures of the gods, and to introduce the more simple worship of the sun. Of this we see traces in the sculptures, made by a native Satrap, who governed the country under Artaxerxes Longimanus (see Fig. [83](#)). We there see Thaumra, the son of the late king Adon-Ra Bakan, or Thannyras,



Fig. 83.

the son of Inarus, as Herodotus calls him, worshipping the sun, Adon-Ra, which is distinguished from the sun of the Egyptians by the absence of wings or asps, and by its

sending forth a number of rays, each ending with a human hand, and yet more particularly by the absence of the human figure or statue of the god. In this the sculptor borrows a figure from the name of the Persian king, who was called Longimanus, because his arm was supposed to over Asia, reach Africa, and part of Europe. And when we see a sculpture with one of the early Theban kings worshipping the figure of Amun-Ra, with the same sun, as in Fig. 84, we may suppose that the rays ending in human hands were an after addition made by order of the Persians.



Fig. 84.

It was in the fourth century before the Christian era that Plato, the Athenian, visited Egypt to study at Heliopolis, where was then a celebrated school of philosophy. The country was at the time independent, and under the rule of a native sovereign, but it had been for a century oppressed by the Persian conquerors. Heliopolis was on the Phenician side of the Delta, in the neighbourhood of the district inhabited by the Jews, who by this time had very much acquired the use of the Greek language, from the colonists on the other side of the Delta. Hence Greek, Hebrew, Phenician, Persian, and Egyptian opinions had been there freely, brought into comparison, and the consequence was a burst of free thought which made Heliopolis for a time an important centre of learning.

p. 75

That Plato's opinions were very, much the fruit of his visit to this celebrated school is clear from his writings. Here he may have gained better views of a future state of rewards and punishment; but here he may have lost somewhat of the pure morality before taught to him by Socrates. He seems to have been more particularly pleased with the Egyptian mysticism. But had Plato's philosophy died with himself it

would claim little notice here; it is the writings of his followers that make us note its rise as important in the history of Egyptian opinions.



"Pharaoh Thaomra, his name successor to Adonra."

[Next: The Religion Under the Ptolemies.](#)

p. 76

THE RELIGION UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.

AFTER the conquest of Egypt by the Greeks in the year B.C. 332, and on the building of the Greek city of Alexandria, Heliopolis lost much of its importance as a school. Alexandria then became the seat of that mixture of opinions which had made Heliopolis famous. The Jews there gained yet further acquaintance with Greek literature, and gave to the Greeks some knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. The Greeks of Alexandria embraced many of the Egyptian views of religion, and some of them even entered the Egyptian temples as priests, and lived under all the austerities of the Egyptian monastic rules. We even now possess on papyrus the original documents, in the Greek language, relating to the complaints of a Greek who lived as a monk in the Temple of Serapis, near Memphis, in the reign of Ptolemy Philometor. He suffered from the jealousy of the Egyptian monks in the same building. He lived confined to one cell, and our English, or rather, Latin word, a recluse, is simply a translation of the Greek name therein given to the Egyptian monks.

Greeks and Egyptians intermarried, and the children of these mixed marriages, who were declared to be Egyptians, not Greeks, carried many Greek opinions into the Egyptian religion. Under Greek toleration, as we learn from the sculptures, the Theban temples freed themselves from the intrusion of gods from Lower Egypt, and

p. 77

returned to their old worship of Amun-Ra. But old religions are not easily re-established. Changes are always going forward, and during the reigns of the Greek kings, and particularly among the Greeks who held the Egyptian religion, we find one god rising in rank over the others, as if he were their chief or king. This was Serapis, who at first had united the two characters of Osiris and Apis, but was now receiving from his worshippers yet more of the attributes which had been divided among so many gods. He was, like Osiris, the husband of Isis, and judge of the dead, but, unlike Osiris, he had no portion of human nature. On the building of Alexandria, the chief temple, the largest in the world, was dedicated to his worship. It was called the Serapium. To Serapis the prayers and sacrifices of many were directed as to one only God, and when the altars were dedicated to "The Great God, the Sun, Serapis, and the other gods of the temple," these others, without names and of lower rank, took away very little from his oneness. In this way an approach was being made in some minds to monotheism, which was, of course, very much assisted by the doctrine of Plurality in Unity, by which it had been always held that many gods could be at the same time only one god. Other temples in Alexandria were that to Pan and that to Neptune for the use of the sailors in the harbour. Among the Greeks, however, we learn more of their philosophy than of their theology.

In Alexandria we find Platonism becoming every year more mystical, or if we may say so, more

Egyptian and less Greek. We find traces of it in the Septuagint, and in the Apocryphal Book of Jesus, the son of Sirach, and in the Book of Wisdom, and in the works of Philo, all written in Egypt. When Christianity rises into notice in Alexandria,

p. 78

it in the same way always wears somewhat of a Platonic dress, as we see in the writings of Athenagoras, Clemens, and Origen. The quarrel between the Christian sects in Egypt arises always from the struggle between the Greek and Egyptian opinions, or rather the struggle how far Christianity, which entered Egypt as a Greek religion, and which readily met the Egyptian opinions so far as to ally itself with the new Platonism-how far it will yet further consent to become Egyptian.

In the Hebrew Scriptures we find frequent mention of Egypt, of its wars, and of its arts and civilisation. The writer of the Book of Job shows some acquaintance with Egypt. The ornaments of its temple worship are sometimes copied, while its idolatry and superstition are again and again forbidden in the Mosaic laws. But we find very few traces of the Hebrew writers having borrowed any Egyptian opinions, except in the second and third chapters of Genesis, where the garden of Eden is watered like Egypt without rain; where there is a sacred tree of Life, and another of the knowledge of good and evil; where the serpent is able to speak, and tempts the woman to sin, and is declared to be the enemy of the human race; and where the door of the garden is guarded by a cherub, or one of the Cabeiri, with a flaming sword, lest the sinner should approach the tree of Life. But, in more modern times, we become acquainted with a body of Jews who had been for centuries living in Egypt, and were no longer confined to their own towns, on the eastern branch of the Nile. They had learned the use of the Greek language, and were thence called Hellenists; and among them we find many philosophical and even religious opinions, which owe their origin to the Egyptian priests among whom they were living. They received a wise patronage from the

p. 79

Ptolemies, who founded the museum of learning in Alexandria. In the third century before the Christian era, some of them translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, for the use of their brethren who were less acquainted with Hebrew; and the translators often show a leaning towards opinions very foreign from those of the original writers. In the disputed question of the age of the world, in order to make it better agree with Egyptian history, they add largely to the age of each patriarch at the time of his son's birth, thus making the world older by an Egyptian cycle, of four times 365 years. They lessened the number of years during which the children of Jacob dwelt in Egypt, by 175 years, in which they may have been justified by the Egyptian records, though they neglected their duty as faithful translators. In the Book of Zechariah, the translator's knowledge of the climate leads him to omit the threat against the Israelites in Egypt, that they shall have no rain if they come not up to Jerusalem to the feast. The translator of the Chronicles changes the name of the great Jewish feast in a manner that gives to the word an Egyptian etymology, instead of a Jewish. He calls it not Pascha, the *passing over*, but Pasek, the *leading forth*.

As the Jews, in their Greek translation of the Bible, thought fit to accept from the Egyptians, and to introduce some improvements as they might call them, into the Chronology, so they were not willing to be behindhand in mysticism and spiritual refinements. By a refinement of criticism, they sometimes found more meaning in their scriptures than had ever entered the minds of the writers. Thus, when the Psalmist, speaking of the power of Jehovah, says, with a truly eastern figure (Psalm clv. 4): *He maketh the winds his messengers and the lightnings his servants*, these translators change the sentence into a

p. 80

philosophical description of the spiritual nature of angelic beings, and say, *He maketh his angels into spirits and his servants into a flame of fire*. Again, when Isaiah (chap. xi. 2), describes the spirit of the Lord, as *a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and might, a Spirit of knowledge and godly fear*, the Jews of Egypt made these six qualities of the mind, into six angelic beings, which had proceeded from the Almighty, and they added a Spirit of piety, to complete the mystic number of seven, which with the Almighty himself, afterwards made the Ogdoad. We have seen in our notice of the gods of the Egyptians, as learned from the monuments, how they often supposed that a god divided himself into two, three, or more characters, which may have given rise to this opinion of spiritual beings proceeding from the Almighty. But we now begin to see hints of some, at least, among the Egyptians beginning to reject polytheism, and to declare that all their numerous gods were only so many characters of the one Almighty, or else inferior beings which proceeded out of him. Osiris-Apis, or Serapis, the judge of the dead, by becoming chief of the numerous gods, was making some approach to being the sole god. The Alexandrian Jews seem to have had in their mind this Egyptian system of defending polytheism, by declaring that it was only a Plurality in Unity, when they translated Deuteronomy vi. 4. We there read in the Hebrew, *Jehovah is our God, Jehovah alone*; but the Greek translation says, *The Lord our God is one Lord*, meaning simple and undivided, as opposed to a unity formed of plurality. At the same time the Greek translators removed from their Bible some words which declare that God appeared upon earth in a human form to Moses and his companions; and they alter Exodus xxiv. 10, 11, to make it say that they,

p. 81

saw, not the Almighty, but only the place on which he stood to speak to them. In these two cases the translators, instead of making any approach to the Egyptian opinions, retreated yet farther from them.

The opinions of the Egyptians show themselves equally clearly in two of the Apocryphal books of the Bible, which were written by Jews living in Lower Egypt, perhaps in Alexandria; namely, The Wisdom of the Son of Sirach, and The Wisdom of Solomon. The Egyptians had believed that some of their gods, and particularly the four lesser gods of the dead, acted as mediators with the judge Osiris, to turn aside his wrath and the punishment for their sins, and they thought that even their kings had power to do them the same service. No similar opinion appears in the Hebrew Bible; the prophets never speak of any mediator or intercessor as standing between man and his Maker; but the Son of Sirach, misquoting the last words of the Hebrew prophet Malachi, says that Elijah was taken up to heaven for the purpose of acting as a mediator to pacify the wrath of God's judgment before it break forth into fury, and to turn his

heart towards his children (chap. xlvi. 10). This writer also, in his strong figurative expression in praise of Wisdom, follows the Proverbs of Solomon. He makes Wisdom into a person created before the world, who says, "I am the mother of love, and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope." In the second of these two books, The Wisdom of Solomon, God's Word and God's Wisdom, are both spoken of in terms yet more befitting a person. God is said to have made all things by his Word, and to have ordained man by his Wisdom (chap. ix. 1). And again, Wisdom was said to have been with him when he made the world (chap. ix. 9), and his Word afterwards to have leaped down from heaven as

p. 82

a fierce man of war, to punish the Egyptians (xviii. 15). In this way these Alexandrian Jews, making use of bold figures of speech, not unusual in the Hebrew poets, at the same time indulging themselves in a love for Egyptian mysticism, introduce us to a trinity, of God, his Wisdom, and his Word. This is the Trinity described by Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (fl. 120), who is the first Christian writer who makes use of that term, since so common in controversial divinity. This is also the Trinity of *Pistis Sophia*, a Coptic treatise of a later age, which describes the penitential hymns which Wisdom sang at the Creation, and which the Word afterwards conveyed to mankind. It is a Trinity of the Almighty and two of his attributes, and it helped to prepare the minds of the Alexandrians for the Arian Trinity of the third century, and the Athanasian Trinity of the fourth century.

Philo, the eloquent Jew of Alexandria, shows an Egyptian fondness for the mystical properties of numbers, and for finding an allegory or secondary meaning in the plainest narrative. He thus makes the Old Testament speak a meaning more agreeable to the modern views of religion. He says that Abraham's wife Sarah is Wisdom, while Hagar is Instruction, who, after being banished, is recalled by the Word in the form of an angel; and he elsewhere explains God's word to be his first begotten Son, by whom he governs the world. He was the first Jewish writer that applied to the Deity the mystical notion of the Egyptians that everything perfect has three parts. Speaking of the Creator, he says that there are three orders, of which the best is the being that is, and that he has two ancient powers near him, one on the one side and one on the other, the one on the right hand being called God, and the one on the left Lord; and that the middle divinity,

p. 83

accompanied on each side by his powers, presents to the enlightened mind sometimes one mage, and sometimes three. Philo's writings thus explain to us how Platonism became united to Judaism, and again show us several points of agreement between the New Platonists and the Platonic Christians, and jointly, with the "Wisdom of Solomon," teach us the steps by which the Egyptian doctrines of plurality in unity, and of everything perfect having three parts, found their way first into the Alexandrian philosophy, Jewish as well as Pagan, and then into Christianity, and at last established the Christian Trinity. From Philo also we learn that a large body of Egyptian Jews had embraced the monastic rules and the life of self-denial which we have already noted among the Egyptian priests. They bore the name of Therapeutæ. They spent their time in solitary meditation and prayer, and only saw one another on the seventh day. They did not marry; the women lived the same solitary and religious life as the men.

Fasting and mortification of the flesh were the foundation of their virtues. They thus introduced into the neighbourhood of Alexandria a way of life which, though common among the Egyptians, had been unknown in that dissipated city.

We have already seen that the Egyptians gave to every one of their kings the title of God, and in this custom of idolatrous flattery, they were followed by the Greeks of Alexandria. The Ptolemies and their queens were all styled gods. The Saviour-gods were succeeded on the throne by the Brother-gods, the Beneficent-gods, the Father-loving gods, the Illustrious-gods, and others. Such were the titles given to the several Ptolemies. This custom was copied by some of the Greek kings of Syria, and in part continued under the Roman emperors, though

p. 84

Augustus, on his Alexandrian coins, only claims the lower rank of being a Son of God. From such political flattery the meaning of the word in the Greek language got changed. It had by no means the grave and solemn meaning that it has with us, and hence we shall hereafter see that when the Alexandrian theologian penned the Nicene Creed, and wished to declare the true deity of Jesus, it would not have been enough to declare him to be simply God; it was necessary to add emphasis, and to say that he was God from God, very God from very God, and of one substance with God, as the simple word had with the Greeks lost much of its meaning.

The Eleusinian mysteries had been introduced into Alexandria from Greece about 300 years before the Christian era. But it seems probable that they were then only returning to their native soil. What little is known of them seems to be of Egyptian origin, coloured by the Greeks, Egyptian grossness cloaked over by Greek elegance. The temple dedicated to Ceres and Proserpine stood in the south-east quarter of the city, which was thence called the Eleusinis; and there the priestesses, a troop of young women, were to be seen carrying the sacred basket through the streets, and singing hymns in honour of the goddess while they charged all profane persons who met the procession to keep their eyes upon the ground, lest they should see the basket and the priestesses, who were too pure for them to look upon. What was shut up in the basket was, of course, a secret meant never to be known beyond the walls of the temple; and it is only after two centuries that we learn from a coin of Asia Minor (see Fig. [85](#)) that this sacred



Fig. 85

p. 85

basket held a serpent, the enemy of the human race, who introduced sin and death into the world. This is the serpent of which we have seen the conquest in page [46](#), the serpent of the third chapter of Genesis, which misled Eve, and the serpent of wickedness of the Gnostics. Within the temple the hierophant wore the dress and mask of the god Kneph, the crier the mask of Thoth, the priest at the altar the emblem of the moon, while another with the dress of Ra carried a torch. The celebration of these mysteries, whatever their meaning was, was said to be a screen for immorality and vice, and probably with much truth.

Alexandria under the Ptolemies, a Greek city built on Egyptian soil, and colonised by strangers who were courted to settle there. shows a strange mixture of European, Asiatic, and Egyptian civilisations. There the, religious opinions and the philosophy of all these nations were alike patronised by the sovereign, and alike struggled for mastery, and in some minds moulded themselves into union. Political despotism was there, united with freedom of philosophic thought, active trade with industrious scholarship, credulity with scepticism, Egyptian superstitions with Greek satire, the self-denying asceticism of the Jewish Therapeutæ with the immoralities of the Eleusinian mysteries, the science and cold criticism of one half of the Museum, with the imaginative Platonism of the other. There flourished in particular, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, anatomy, verbal criticism, together with fortune-telling, mysticism, and scoffing. The despotism of the sovereign checked all lofty aims after moral excellence; but the toleration, or rather impartial patronage, which descended like an heirloom with the crown, allowed such a free play to speculative opinions in religion and

p. 86

philosophy, as the world has never seen in any other country, or at any other time whatever. This was in part interrupted by the wars in Judea, during which the Egyptian Jews rebelled against the government, and blood was often shed in the streets of Alexandria. But if this political warfare in some respects took the form of religious persecution by the government, it very little disturbed the minds of the Alexandrian men of letters, The Greeks in that city were too little in earnest, too indifferent to all opinions, to be intolerant of any, till Christianity gave a new importance to religion, and it became a bond of union between Egyptian slave and Greek freeman, which clogged the hitherto unchecked despotism of the rulers.



The Bull Apis and Winged Sun on Coins of Cyprus.

[Next: The Religion Under the Romans](#)

THE RELIGION UNDER THE ROMANS

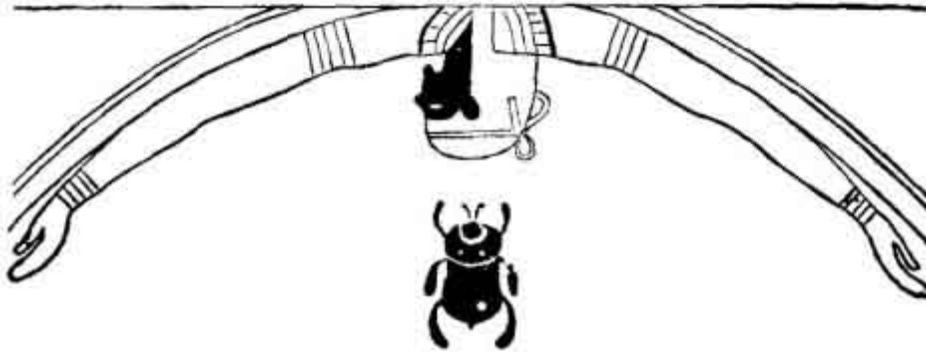


Fig. 86.--Horus as the vault of Heaven.

DURING the two or three centuries before the Christian era, Osiris the judge of the dead, in his character of Osiris-Apis, or Serapis, had risen to a higher rank in the Egyptian mythology, and had been personified by the Ptolemies in Alexandria as the chief of the gods. He had at the same time become more a god to be feared, of which we shall see clearer proof when we come to speak of the Gnostics, when he will appear as the god of evil, under the form of the wicked serpent. This seems to have turned the worshippers towards other gods, who might shield them from his severity and wrath; and it led them to seek another judge, whom they might look upon with love. Such friends they found in the goddess Isis and her son Horus, who then took that place in their affections which, under the kings of Sais, had been held by the goddess Neith. Horus, in one of his three characters, that of the Scarabæus, takes the place of Amun-Ra, the all-seeing god; and we find the vault of heaven represented not by the outstretched wings of either that god of Thebes, or of Neith, the queen of Sais, but by the

two arms of Horus, with the head hanging downwards, as the Almighty is painted by some of the early Italian masters (see Fig. 86). At the same time, either alone, or in his three characters of Horus the King, Horus the Scarabeus, and Horus-Ra, he sits in the sacred barge, which used to be filled with either Amun-Ra or Kneph-Ra. To Horus, with the head of a hawk, is then given the two sceptres of Osiris, and he is sometimes worshipped on the funereal papyri as the judge of the dead in place of his father. The sinner hopes to find more mercy at the judgment seat of the son. He then even rises over his father, and becomes the more important of the two in the minds of the worshippers. On a mummy case in the British Museum, where Horus is seated on the throne, holding the two sceptres of the judge, Osiris and Isis are standing before him as gods of lower rank, and as he is spoken of by the writer of Deuteronomy, who says, chap. xxxiii. 27, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

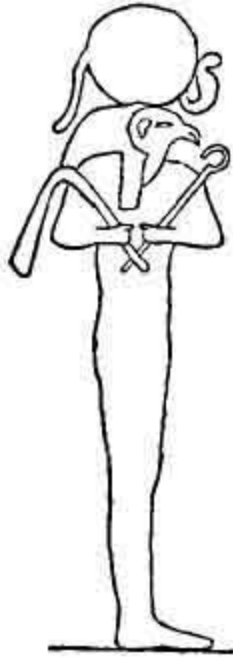


Fig. 87.

At times he forms one of a trinity in unity, with Ra and Osiris, as in Fig. 87, a god with the two sceptres of Osiris, the hawk's head of Horus, and the sun of Ra. This is the god described to Eusebius, who tells us that when the oracle was consulted about the divine nature, by those who wished to understand this complicated mythology, it had answered, "I am Apollo and Lord and Bacchus," or, to use the Egyptian names, "I am Ra and Horus and Osiris." Another god, in the form of a porcelain idol to be worn as a charm, shows us Horus as one of a trinity in unity, in name, at least,

p. 89

agreeing with that afterwards adopted by the Christians--namely, the Great God, the Son God, and the Spirit God. In Fig. 88, the ugly grotesque human body is that of the great Pthah, the hawk's wings are those of the child Horus, and the ram's head is that of Kneph, the Spirit. But the favourite character of Horus is that of the Son. Instead of being a crowned king, the avenger of his Fig. 88. father, he becomes a young man, or rather a child, with a finger on his mouth, as if he had not yet learned to talk, as in Fig. 89. He is sometimes seated, as a baby, within the leaves of a lotus flower representing the rising sun; and even while a baby, holds the sceptres of Osiris as judge of the (lead. Among the porcelain images, made to be worn as charms, and to be tied round the neck with a string, he is often a child in his mother's arms (see Fig. 90).



Fig. 88



Fig. 89



Fig. 90

This worship of Osiris, or Serapis, as the wrathful god to be feared, and of Isis and Horus, as the merciful gods to be loved, was at its height when Antony and Cleopatra were conquered by Augustus, and Egypt became a Roman province. With the obelisks, the statues and the gold, which were carried to Rome, were at the same time taken the Egyptian superstitions, and by many they were as much valued. Horace tells us that the beggar at the corner of the street in Rome in his time would ask the passers

p. 90

by for alms in the name of the holy Osiris; and Juvenal says that the painters of that city almost lived upon the goddess Isis, such was the popularity of that most winning form of worship, which is still continued there in the pictures of the Virgin Mary, with the infant Jesus in her arms.

The spread of Egyptian opinions in Rome was so rapid under Augustus that it was felt to be of political importance, and it alarmed that prudent Emperor. The Romans by no means equalled the Greeks in their indifference to all religions and their toleration of all. Augustus made a law that no Egyptian ceremony should be allowed within either the city or the suburbs of Rome. But his law was without much effect, as at the same time Virgil, the court poet, was teaching the Egyptian millennium, or the resurrection of the dead when the thousand years are ended, and borrowing visions of the infernal regions from the Egyptian funereal papyri. Tiberius repeated the same law; but so little did it check the inroad of Egyptian superstition, that when the secular games were celebrated in Rome under the Emperor Claudius, the fabulous Egyptian bird, the phoenix, was said to have arrived there. Nero openly patronised Apollonius of Tyrana, who, under the guidance of the Egyptian priests, and by the direct appointment of the Egyptian sacred tree, professed himself a teacher from heaven. Vespasian was so far pleased with the Egyptians that, when in Alexandria, he undertook, with their approval, to work miracles. His son, Domitian, wholly gave way to public opinion, and built in Rome a temple to Serapis, and another to Isis. Holy, water was then brought from the Nile, for the use of the votaries in the temple of Isis in the Campus Martius; and a college of priests was maintained there with a splendour worthy of the Roman capital. The wealthy Romans wore

p. 91

upon their fingers gems engraved with the head of Hor-pi-krot, or Horus the child, called by them Harpocrates (see Fig. 91). The Museums of Europe contain many statues of the Egyptian gods made about this time by Roman artists, or perhaps by Greek artists in Rome, such as Jupiter-Serapis, Diana-Triformis, and Harpocrates. The Emperor Hadrian made his favourite Antinous into an Egyptian god; and Commodus had his head shaved as a priest of Isis, that he might more properly carry an Anubis-staff in the sacred processions in honour of the goddess. These circumstances are surely evidence enough of the readiness with which Rome under the Emperors shaped its Paganism after the Egyptian model, and prepare us to see without surprise that it looked to the same source for its views of Christianity. They prepare us for the remark of Origen, that all the neighbouring nations borrowed their religious rites and ceremonies from Egypt. (In Epist. ad Rom. ii. 495.)



Fig. 91



Egyptian gods on a coin of Malta.

[Next: Christianity Under the Roman Emperors.](#)

p. 92

CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE ROMAN EMPERORS.

CHRISTIANITY was first preached in Egypt by the Evangelist Mark about thirty years after the Crucifixion. He had sailed with Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts xv. 39), and thence probably went on to Alexandria. There he appointed, as the first of a succession of bishops, Ananiah, a Jew. The succeeding bishops seem to have been Greeks; so we may suppose that in Alexandria the religion made less progress with the Jews. Indeed, how fast Christianity spread during the first hundred years, among the sceptical Greeks of that city, is unknown. But at the end of that time we find full proof of how largely the Egyptians had embraced it by our finding the extent to which Egyptian opinions were received among the Christians. Egyptian mysticism, which had found such a ready entrance into the Greek and Roman Paganism, was not harmless when it came in contact with Christianity, whether it appeared in its own dress, or concealed under the guise of Alexandrian philosophy. From the very first we hear of it as an enemy to be shunned. The Apostle Paul wisely advises Timothy to avoid the antitheses of Gnosticism, or "the oppositions of Science falsely so called" (1 Tim. vi. 20). This Gnosticism was one of the forms in which we shall presently see mysticism uniting itself to Christianity in Alexandria. The Alexandrian opinions also appear in the Canonical

p. 93

Epistle to the Hebrews. There Jesus is no longer the Teacher of a new Religion, as in the gospels, but he acts as a mediator or advocate before the judge on behalf of mankind, as in the writings of the Son of Sirach, and as we have seen the Egyptian lesser gods acting (in page [51](#)), not as a mediator to persuade the sinner to repent, but to persuade the judge to forgive the sin. And his death is no longer that of a martyr to the great cause of regenerating his fellow-creatures, but it is somewhat of an atoning sacrifice, made to propitiate the judge, a doctrine which is shown on the sculpture in Fig. [70](#), page [51](#). These Alexandrian opinions were probably held by Apollos of Alexandria and Barnabas of Cyprus; and it was against some such "philosophy and vain deceit after the traditions of men," accompanied by a "voluntary humility and worshipping of angels," that Paul warns the Colossians (ii. 8; ii. 18; iv. 10). Soon afterwards were added to the Gospel of Matthew the first two chapters, giving to Jesus a miraculous birth, without an earthly father, chapters of which we have historic information that they formed no part of the original Gospel, and which receive no support from the Gospels of Mark or John, or from any of the Epistles. The first two, chapters also in Luke, the poetical chapters, though they allow Jesus to be the son of Joseph as well as of Mary, equally show their Egyptian origin. They give the circumstances attending his birth almost as if they were copied from the Egyptian sculpture in page 18, where we have seen the annunciation, the conception, the birth, and the adoration of the child, who afterwards became King Amunotph III.

In the year A.D. 160, a hundred years after Mark had landed in Alexandria, we find four bishops governing as many Egyptian churches, which had adopted Christianity

p. 94

in some form or other. But whenever we hear of these Egyptian Christians, they are by the Greeks called Heretics. Numbers of them had readily consented to be baptised, and to fling away the belief in their old gods. But their new religious opinions had very little in common with the religion preached by Jesus and his apostles. Their Persian conquerors, though too tyrannical to win many minds from Polytheism, may yet have helped to undermine the belief in gods whose statues they had broken. The Greek conquerors, whose ridicule gained weight from their greater refinement, had further weakened the faith of some minds. Thus the Egyptians may have been somewhat prepared by their own doubts, though in a less degree than the Greeks and Romans, for the introduction of a new religion. But on the other hand, if the Egyptians had fewer theological doubts, they had more religious earnestness; and Christianity made its way, not only because the nations were opening their eyes to their intellectual errors, but because they were rising to an aim after more moral purity. Of the Pagan nations best known to us, the Egyptians were the most real believers in a resurrection from the dead, in a day of judgment, and in a future state of rewards and punishments. Through these doctrines a wide door was open for the entrance of Christianity. Having been polytheists, they readily received Jesus Christ as a god in the place of some of their own; and that he should have been put to death by his enemies, could present no difficulty to their minds, as they had always been taught that their own god, Osiris, had died by, an equally cruel death. Horus, the son, during the latter century, had risen to the rank of judge, and to be thought more of than Osiris, and hence Jesus was soon thought more worthy of worship than our Heavenly Father. A

p. 95

dying god was one of the great facts in their religious philosophy; and though they rejected their own gods, they could by no means so easily reject their old opinions. However, the despised Egyptians, on owning themselves Christians, and submitting to baptism, were at once received as equals in the society of the Greek Christians. They were raised, not legally, but socially, from slaves to be freemen. That any of

the Greeks, their masters, should take the trouble to preach to them, to persuade them, to try to win them over to their own views of religion, was an honour which they had never before received; and as they owed it to Christianity, they cannot but have been led to look upon Christianity with favourable eyes.

The new religious opinions, however, of the Egyptians had very little in common with the religion of the Apostles. They took such parts of the Gospel as suited their views, and could be fitted on to their old religion; but these rays of light they mixed up and buried under such a mass of superstition, that the Apostles themselves would not easily have recognised their own doctrines. The Christianity of the Egyptians, thus corrupted by the old Paganism of the country, shows itself in Alexandria first under the name of the Gnostic heresy. Gnosticism, that is, science or knowledge was the proud name given by its professors to a confused mixture of Greek philosophy and Egyptian superstition, to which they made no difficulty of adding Christianity. We learn something of it from the writers who oppose it, and something of it from their own sculptured gems, and something, even, from the Alexandrian coins of the emperors. As it was founded on a union between Greek, Egyptian, and Jewish opinions, it probably took its rise in Heliopolis, which was the most celebrated school before the building of Alexandria. But

p. 96

afterwards it spread from Alexandria to all the countries where Greek was spoken.

The peculiarities of the Gnostics very much show themselves in the attempt to explain the origin of evil--that never-failing source of difficulty to philosophical reasoners. They held the Eastern opinion of two equal and co-eternal Beings, the one the author of good, and the other of evil; that between these two there was an unceasing warfare, as between light and darkness, life and death, spirit and matter. These are the "oppositions of science, falsely so, called," against which the Apostle Paul warned Timothy. The Gnostics held that matter was essentially evil, and consequently that God could not be its author. Even the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon says that God did not create death. The Supreme God and the Creator of the World were with the Gnostics two different Beings, and the latter was looked upon as the God of the Jews and the author of the Mosaic law. In this scheme, the Being with whom men have chiefly to do, either in this world or in the next, is the Creator of the World, the author of evil; and we see its connection with the old Egyptian opinions, by the engraved figures on the coins and gems. On Fig. 92, an Alexandrian coin of Hadrian, we see the Serpent of Good and the Serpent of Evil, both so, common on the Egyptian monuments. The former is well distinguished by his swollen chest, but it is the latter, the Serpent of Evil, that wears the crown of Osiris as judge of the dead. On a coin of Antoninus (Fig 93) the Serpent of Evil is represented as Serapis, having the head of an old man with a basket on the top, as the great god and judge, while on.



Fig. 92

p. 97

the engraved gem (Fig. 94) the same serpent has a glory round its head, and is entitled the Spirit of Evil, and underneath it is written the magical word, Abrasax, hurl me not, an Egyptian word, which the Greeks made use of, as believing that the evil spirits were better acquainted with the Egyptian language than with the Greek. From thus representing the creator of the world under the form of a serpent, some of the Gnostics were named Ophitæ, or Serpent-worshippers; and in giving to this Being the name of Jao, a word written on his shield in Fig. 95, they declared him to be the Jah, or Jehovah of the Jews.



Fig. 93



Fig. 94



Fig. 95

Another favourite doctrine of the Gnostics was that of Æons, or spiritual beings, which proceeded from the Almighty, or, rather, into which the Almighty had in part divided himself. These were seven in number, of whom one was the Christ, who came down and dwelt in the body of Jesus. This opinion of a god dividing himself into several persons, or characters, was part of the old Egyptian mythology, as we have seen in page [12](#); and these seven spirits, or Æons, we met with in the Greek translation of Isaiah, in page [62](#). The Gnostics, classing them with the Almighty as eight persons who together made only one God, worshipped them under the name of the Ogdoad, which is, the earliest system of plurality in unity that we meet with among Christians of any sect. As the everlasting God

p. 98

was himself Eternity, so these angelic beings which proceeded from him were called Æons, ages, or limited periods of time, a name which seems to deny that they are of equal rank with the Eternal Being. And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, a book which shows much acquaintance with Alexandrian opinions, the Almighty is described as God who made the Æons or ages (chap. i. 2). A later sect of Gnostics raised the number of Æons to thirty.

As the hostility of Matter to Spirit was the cause of all evil, the aim of Gnosticism Was to purify its followers from the corruptions of Matter; and this Was to be done by making them more perfect in Gnosis or mystical knowledge. And hence some thought that the body was to be kept under the practice of self-denial, and by a rigid system of discipline; While others who had persuaded themselves that their knowledge was everything, despised the distinctions of the moral law, and, justly or unjustly, were accused of gross vice.

These speculative and mystical opinions, which show themselves among the Christians in the form of Gnosticism, and among the Jews and Greek Pagans in the more modified form of New Platonism, took their rise in the School of Heliopolis, where the opinions of Jews, Greeks, and Egyptians had freely mingled, and had each made some change in the others. We have spoken of the changes introduced into Christianity by this mixing together of races; but the change in the old Egyptian religion shows in itself in an approach towards the worship of one God. It was to be brought about by the help of various subtleties, without rejecting the old Polytheism, and chiefly by means of the doctrine of Plurality in Unity, by which, as We have before seen, they, readily divided one God into several persons, and equally readily united several Gods into one

p. 99



Fig. 96.

person. Plutarch tells us that they worshipped Osiris, Isis, and Horus, under the form of a triangle, of which Horus was the shorter side. Of these representations of the Egyptian Trinity, we have many small specimens in our museums (see Fig. [96](#)). He further tells us that they held that everything perfect had three parts, and, therefore, that their god of goodness made himself threefold, while their god of evil remained

oracles, the Eleusinian mysteries, and the ceremonies in the great temple of Serapis. But the cold criticism and scepticism of the Museum, may have driven many minds to feel more pleasure in credulity. Clemens shows some love of mysticism in his fondness for the sacred power of numbers, and Origen in his finding an allegory or second meaning hidden under the simple history of the Bible. And the praiseworthy wish to convert the Egyptians to Christianity led to describing the new religion in terms as near as possible to the old Paganism.

Clemens, in his words, though not so much in the meaning of his words, goes a long way to meet the opinions of the Egyptian Christians. He writes in favour of Gnosticism, *Science or Knowledge*, and though he is far from meaning the "Science falsely so called," spoken of by the Apostle Paul, which now goes by the name of Gnosticism, yet he cannot but have given some countenance to it, by adopting the language of his mystical neighbours. He describes every good man as having it in his power to rise from being a slave, to become a faithful servant of God, then a son, and at last a God walking in the flesh. Such words were understood figuratively, as they were meant, by the Platonic Christians of Alexandria; and it is only in sound that they agreed with the opinions of the Egyptians, who had accepted a belief in Jesus by considering him sometimes a god who had been put to death like Osiris, and sometimes a son of God in the same sense as their own Horus. But these words, though at first used figuratively, coloured the opinions of those who understood them literally.

If the Platonic Christians fancied that they were in any degree bringing over the Egyptians towards their own opinions by thus going forward to meet them, they were

p. 102

very much mistaken. The attempt to bridge over the gulf which separated the two opinions, did less to win the polytheists to Christianity than it did to make the Christianity of the country polytheistic. At the same time this concealing the difference between the two classes of believers, was very much driving away from Christianity the Jewish converts, who, like the Egyptians, though in an opposite direction, were equally straightforward in holding their opinions, and in the manner of expressing them.

Soon after the time of Clemens and Origen, the Alexandrian opinions again moved a step further towards the Egyptians. Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, after first writing against the Gnostics, who said that there were thirty persons in the Godhead, then writes to defend the new doctrine of a Trinity against Paul, the Syrian bishop, who said that God was One and undivided, and that Jesus was a man; and then again, Dionysius writes against Sabellius, Bishop of Cyrene, who, like Paul the Syrian, said that God was One and undivided, but, unlike Paul, added that he had appeared on earth in the form of Jesus. Against these opposite opinions Dionysius defended a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in so doing he by no means comes up to the Egyptian standard. He distinctly denies to Jesus any higher rank than that of the first of created beings. His Trinity may be called the Arian Trinity, and is important as it marks one of the steps by which the Alexandrians were slowly fitting their mysticism to the Egyptian polytheism. The only advance which the Egyptians in return made towards the Greeks, was in the sect of the Docetæ, who were willing to get over the difficulty of a dying God, by their doctrine of apparitions. They said that Jesus died only in appearance, and hence their name of Docetæ, or *Seemers*. In the

p. 103

same way the Egyptians, five centuries earlier, had told Herodotus that Helen had been carried to Troy only in appearance, and that her real body had never been there. But the Greeks did not accept this view of the matter.

For the persecution of the Christians, both Greek and Egyptian, which began with the third century, we must seek all explanation in the state of the country in the years before the Egyptian rebellions. The Greek Christians had courted the Egyptians, had preached to them, had in part educated them, had raised them in their own eyes, and had made common cause with them, and thus, made them discontented under their foreign rulers. This religious stir the government tried to stop, and the persecution of the Christians was as much political as religious. The Greeks, or the Roman government, which was very much in the hands of the Greeks, would probably never have been roused into intolerance unless the peace of the country had been threatened by an increased activity of mind among the Egyptians. The rebellion which followed made a yet further change in the religion. When the rebellion broke out, the union between Greek Christians, and Egyptian Christians was broken; and when the rebellions were over, the Egyptians no longer acknowledged by the Greeks as their religious partners.

From the death of Alexander Severus, in the year A.D. 235, till the accession of Constantine in A.D. 323, Egypt was torn to pieces by civil wars between rival emperors, by the invasion of the Syrians, and yet more by repeated rebellions of the native Egyptians against the power of Rome. While the disturbances continued Greek opinions were going fast out of favour with the Egyptians; the Greek mind was losing its supremacy, and Egyptian Christianity was henceforth to be for the most part under

p. 104

the guidance of Egyptians themselves. It was at the end of the third century, during the years of trouble, that the worship of the Persian

Mithra, the god of the sun, was introduced into Egypt. In the Persian system of two gods, one good and the other wicked, Mithra was the god of goodness. The symbol in his worship best known is the figure of a hero, in Phrygian cap and trowsers, mounted on a sinking bull, and stabbing it in sacrifice to the unseen god, while a dog licks up the blood from the wound (see Fig. 100). This new worship received little favour in Egypt or Alexandria, and its ignorant followers were as



Fig. 100

wickedly accused of slaying their fellow citizens on the altars of the Persian god. The only part of this religion that gained a cordial welcome was the doctrine of Manicheism, a doctrine so closely akin to Gnosticism that it was hardly new. It was the doctrine of two supreme principles equally eternal and self-existent. One was mind and the other matter, one causing the happiness and the other the misery of men, one living in light and the other in darkness. This opinion, like the Antitheses of Gnosticism, had its rise in the difficulty of explaining the origin of sin, and of understanding how a merciful Creator could allow the existence of evil. The ignorant, in all ages of Christianity, have held the same opinion in

p. 105

one form or other, thinking that sin arose from the contrivances of a Devil, whom the All-powerful was not powerful enough to overcome, or else from the wickedness of the flesh itself. The Jews alone proclaimed that God created good, and God created evil. But the Jewish converts were now declared heretics by the more superstitious converts from Paganism, who were every year making the, standard of orthodoxy conform more and more to Egyptian ignorance, and less to Greek intelligence. Hence Manicheism and the belief in a Devil took deep hold of the Egyptian Christians.

[Next: Christianity Under The Byzantine Emperors.](#)

p. 106

CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS.

When quiet was re-established in Egypt by the Roman armies, after more than sixty years of civil troubles, it was found to be no longer the same country that it had been under the Antonines. The framework of society had been broken, the Greeks had lessened in numbers and still more in weight. Greek toleration of all religions and of all modes of thought then gave way to Egyptian more bigoted earnestness. The bright days of Egypt as a Greek kingdom ended with the rebellions against Gallienus, Aurelian, and Dioclesian. The native Egyptians and the old superstitions then rise again into notice, as Greek civilization sinks around them. The building of Constantinople, and the removal of the seat of government from Rome to that new Greek city, yet further lessened the numbers, and thus the rank of the Greeks in Alexandria. Among the Christians, the more superstitious Egyptians, whose religion was still polytheism under a Christian form, as being now the more numerous, are able in their turn to call the Greek Christians heretics. Then began the celebrated Arian controversy, as to whether Jesus Christ were a God or a created being; and the same intolerance, which ten centuries earlier would not allow the Libyans to eat beef, is now uneasy at there being two opinions about the miraculous

p. 107

birth of the Saviour. The opinions of Arius were the same as those of the late Bishop Dionysius, that Jesus was the First of Created Beings. But what was orthodoxy before the rebellions, while the Greeks were able to treat the Egyptians as slaves, was heresy since the Egyptians had found out their weight and power; and the young and able Athanasius, a Greek deacon in the Alexandrian church, rose into importance by taking the Egyptian side in the controversy.

It was not in the first instance seen that the dispute was in reality a political struggle between the Egyptians and the Greeks, but it took the form of a religious argument as to whether Jesus was an uncreated being of out, substance with God, or was inferior to the Father. The quarrel in Alexandria unsettled the faith of the world, so much was that city a guide both to the east and west in matters of religion; and the Emperor Constantine was persuaded to call a council of bishops to meet at Nicæa, in Asia Minor, to settle the question. Unfortunately the decline of civilization, and the increase of ignorance during the last two centuries had been as great in Greece and Italy as in Alexandria. The civil wars between rival emperors, the licence of the soldiers, the inroads of the barbarians, and the progress of despotism, had crushed free thought and genius everywhere. The Roman or western half of the known world was wholly without a writer of any kind, except in the ranks of the prejudiced theologians; and in the Greek or Eastern provinces what little learning or cultivation remained was chiefly to be found in Alexandria. Hence when the creed of Christendom was to be settled by the votes of the bishops, after

Egyptian superstition had already gained a strong footing in Alexandria, any purer or more simple views of Christianity,

p. 108

stood little chance of holding their ground in an assembly of divines summoned from yet wider and more ignorant provinces.

At Nicæa, as is usually the case in an assembly of divines, the more superstitious talked down and frowned down the more reasonable. The Emperor sided with the Egyptians, which may be explained by what we have before seen, because Greece and Rome had been used to look up to Egypt as their teacher in religion; and he had lately, on building Constantinople, received from Alexandria fifty copies of Church Lessons, for the use of his new churches. The Egyptian opinions, supported by the eloquence and earnestness of the young Athanasias, the spokesman of the Egyptian bishops, prevailed. He drew up the celebrated form of words, now known by the name of the Nicene Creed, as a statement of the opinions which the Egyptians contended for; and the Council ended their labours by ordering everybody to receive it as the true Christian faith.

The controversy was by no means at once settled by this decree. When Constantine saw that the quarrel was more political than religious, he took the other side of the question, and joined the Greeks; and Egypt continued almost in rebellion on a point of controversial theology during the reigns of Constantine, Constantius, Julian, Jovian, and Valens. For forty years Athanasius, the darling hero of the Egyptians, was able to defy the power of the Emperors, and after his death peace was restored only on the accession of Theodosius, who took the side of the Egyptians, and allowed them in their turn to persecute the more enlightened Arian Greeks. From that time forward the Christianity of the superstitious Egyptians became the Christianity of the majority in Alexandria,

p. 109

and after a time, with very few variations, the Christianity of the greater part of the world.

The aim of the Nicene Creed was to require everybody to acknowledge, that Jesus Christ was a God, in such clear and forcible terms as to turn out of the Church all who would not follow the Egyptians in the mystical opinions which they had introduced, so that there should be no escape for those who believed in one only God, and who gave any whatever lower rank to the Saviour. It declares that there is one God, the Maker of all things, and yet that the one Lord Jesus Christ was not made; that he also was very God of very God, and was yet crucified by Pontius Pilate; that he had been previously incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and made man, although of one substance with the Father. All this carried with it no contradiction to the mind of the Egyptians. They were used to being told and believing that two Gods could be one God. They were used to hear of a God being put to death, as they had always held that Osiris, though a god, had been put to death. They were used to hear of children being born of an earthly mother, and having no earthly father, as they held that many of their kings were so born, being incarnate by the god Amun-Ra. But Athanasius did not introduce into his creed any Egyptian

mysticism to support it, nor did he try to explain away its inconsistency by any play upon words. The Nicene Creed does not mention the Trinity nor the two natures of Christ, but leaves the contradictions stated in the boldest terms. The well-known Athanasian Creed, in which an explanation of the difficulties has been attempted, is supposed to have been written two or three hundred years later, and the name of the great Alexandrian bishop has been given to it, either dishonestly, or because it was thought to represent

p. 110

his opinions. This later creed states that though "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet they are not three Gods, but one God." This is the Egyptian doctrine of plurality in unity, which is represented in numerous sculptures, and explained in pages [12](#) and [98](#). It then asserts the two natures of Christ, that he is both "perfect God and perfect man." This was meant to get over the difficulty of a dying God which had been ridiculed by Xenophanes, in the case of Osiris, five centuries before the Christian era; when he told the Egyptians that if Osiris was a man they should not worship him, and if he was a god they need not lament his sufferings. But this Athanasian Creed, though setting forth the Egyptian opinions, was an offspring of the Latin church, and it is very doubtful whether it would have been wholly approved of by Athanasius. The Egyptians had raised Mary, the wife of Joseph, almost into a goddess, at least into "the mother of God," who had imparted no portion of human nature to her son; they denied the two natures of Christ, and clung faithfully to the words of their own Nicene Creed, which declared that he was "of one substance with the Father."

It was during these years of civil trouble and political agitation that Christianity, or at least a form of religion which called itself Christian, spread over the whole of Egypt. That large class of the population which a few years before formed the priesthood of the old temples, were now Christian monks. They were all zealous supporters of Athanasius, and all earnest against the Arian opinions of the Greeks. For their use, three Egyptian translations of the Bible were made, one into the language used in the western half of the Delta, called Coptic, a second into that of the Eastern half, called Bashmuric,

p. 111

and a third into the Thebaic, for the use of Upper Egypt and Nubia. They readily fitted the old temples to the new religion. Their opinions had undergone but small change. On the rock temple of Kneph, opposite Abou Simbel, they painted the figure of the Saviour, with a glory round his head upon the and thus it became a Christian church (see Fig. [101](#)) The great court-yard of the temple of Medinet Abou, at Thebes, was is used as a



Fig. 101.

cathedral church dedicated to St. Athanasius. In some cases, they removed from before their eyes the memorials of the old superstition, by covering up the sculptures on the walls with mud from the Nile, and white plaster. In other cases, they contented themselves with making a slight change in the sculpture, as at the temple of Asseboua, in Nubia, where they painted the figure of the Apostle Peter over that of the old god of the temple, and the

p. 112

sculpture now represents King Rameses II. presenting his offerings to the Christian Saint (see Fig. [102](#)).



Fig. 102.

By the burst of enthusiasm in favour of Athanasius, the Nicene Creed became the received religion of all native Egyptians, and beyond them of those Alexandrians who aimed at rising into importance by taking the popular side in the quarrel. Arianism, on the other hand, even when supported by, the weak government of the Emperor, lost ground rapidly, and it soon took refuge in the fortified camps of the Greek soldiers. A church was dedicated to the Arian bishop George, within the walls of the strong castle of Babylon, opposite Memphis, and another at Ptolemais, where the Greek garrison collected the toll of the Thebaid, and where the modern village yet bears his name, and is called by the Arabs Geergeh, St. George became a favourite saint with the Greeks in Egypt, and in those few spots where the Greek soldiers were masters of the churches, this Arian and unpopular bishop was often painted on the walls, riding triumphantly on horseback, and slaying the great serpent or dragon of Athanasian error.

At this time a marked separation was taking place between the opinions of Constantinople, the chief seat of

p. 113

the Greek Church, and those of Egypt and Rome. The more civilized Constantinople held aloof for the present from the more, superstitious Egypt as its religious guide. But the case was far otherwise with Rome. Since the building of Constantinople, and the removal of the seat of government to that city, no political quarrel separated Rome from Egypt. Pagan Rome, ever since the union of the two countries under Augustus, except when interrupted by the rebellions, had been eagerly copying the superstitions of Egypt, and Christian Rome still followed the same course.

When in the reign of Constantine the country was quiet, the intercourse between the Egyptian and the Roman churches was renewed under still more favourable circumstances, because the city of Alexandria had become more Egyptian and less Greek than ever it had been before. Constantine, the next Emperor of Rome, openly gave his support to Athanasius when in rebellious disobedience to Constantius, his own sovereign; and the opinions of Athanasius, received the support of the whole Roman church.

At the end of the third century Hesychius, of Alexandria, had published a new edition of the Greek Bible with a corrected text, and such was the credit of Alexandria, as the chief seat of Christian learning, that all distant churches sent there for copies of the Scriptures. When Constantine wanted copies of the Greek scriptures for Rome, he sent for them to Alexandria, and received the approved text from Athanasius. In this, a matter of learning belonging to the last century, the Roman Emperor acted wisely, but in the matter of religious opinions the case was far otherwise.

Alexandria in the fourth century was very different from

p. 114

that Alexandria which had earned its high character for criticism and scholarship, though the change, in the eyes of the Roman church, was a change for the better; and they were equally pleased to import from the same city Alexandrian manuscripts and Egyptian superstitions. All Christendom was copying the monastic institutions of the Thebaid. Italy and the West acknowledged Egypt as their best instructress in all ecclesiastical matters; and the approval which they gave to the ecclesiastical institutions could hardly have been yielded so cordially, unless they at the same time gave a full approval to the religious opinions.

As the Egyptians excelled all other Christians in the practice of self-denial and fleshly mortification, so their religion was naturally thought the most pleasing to God, and their theological views the soundest. Natives of Italy, not content with living in their own monasteries under the strict Theban rules, flocked into Egypt to place themselves under the severe discipline, and to learn the opinions of the ignorant Egyptian monks. As these Latin monks did not understand either Coptic or Greek, they found some difficulty in regulating their lives with the wished for exactness; and the rules of Pacomius, of Theodorus, and of Oresiesis, the most celebrated of the founders, were sent to St. Jerome at Rome, to be by him translated into Latin, for the use of these settlers in the Thebaid. The two countries shaped their opinions so nearly in the same mould, that when St. Jerome visited Egypt he found the church there holding what he called the true Roman faith. Two at least of these teachers of monastic discipline were clearly Egyptians, not Greeks. Their names, Pachomius, or Pa-chem, *a priest of the god Chem*, and Oresiesis, or Hor-se-isis, *Horus the son of Isis*,

p. 115

even without the evidence of the foregoing pages, might have led us to suppose that the source of their theology, both for themselves and for the, Theban monasteries under their rule, was as much Pagan as

Christian.

The closeness with which Western Europe followed, Egypt may be seen even in smaller matters. St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, calls Jesus "the good Scarabæus, who rolled up before him the hitherto unshapen mud of our bodies," thus giving to him one of the names and characters of the god Horus, who is pictured as a scarabæus, with a ball of mud between his feet (see Fig. [103](#)). The ball, which usually means the sun, would seem to have sometimes meant the sins of mankind; and the goddesses Isis and Nephthys are often represented as rolling the same ball before them. St. Augustin also, during the greater part of his life, was a Manichæan, and held the Gnostic opinion of a god of goodness and a god of evil; and he was so far an admirer of the Egyptians, or at least of their practice of making mummies, as to say that they were the only Christians who really and fully, believed in a future resurrection from the dead.



Fig. 103.

If St. Jerome, when noting the religious agreement between Rome and Egypt, really fancied that in anything whatever Rome had been the teacher, he had read history to very little purpose. But Rome and Egypt then held the same views of Christianity, which have since been known as the opinions of the Roman church, and which were at the time rejected as too superstitious by many of the more learned bishops of Constantinople, Asia Minor, and Syria, who for the time held back from the Athanasian opinions.

Hence arose the separate establishment of the Greek

p. 116

church, which for a short time was Arian, and which from political causes has ever since been disjoined from the Roman church. Political causes also, arising from the disturbed state of the world in the fifth century, presently separated Egypt from Italy; and then the Coptic and the Roman church ceased to hold so exactly the same opinions. As Greek intelligence offered every year less check to Egyptian ignorance, the Coptic church became yet more superstitious; though, fortunately for Rome, that city was no longer in danger of being led to follow.

The churches of Constantinople and Greece, with the Greek churches of Asia Minor and Syria, did not, as we have said, at first move towards the Egyptian opinions quite so fast as Italy and the west. But the change from the earlier faith was presently quickened in the East by political circumstances. On the death of the Emperor Valens in A.D. 379, Theodosius, a general who hail been born in Spain, and brought up in Western Christianity, was made Emperor of Constantinople and the East. The disturbed

state of his dominions called for the strong arm of military despotism; and Theodosius required the church to give the same obedience to his simple will that he received from the army. He at once dismissed the Arian patriarch of Constantinople, and ordered all the clergy to be turned out of their churches if they would not receive the Nicene Creed. He summoned a council of bishops to meet at Constantinople, for the purpose of having the Nicene Creed declared to be the creed of the church of the whole world. He did not summon to it either the Egyptian bishops or the Western bishops; they already held the Nicene faith. He summoned only the Eastern church, and in that council, under his orders, the Nicene Creed was reenacted forty-five years after the Arians had been allowed

p. 117

to re-enter the church. The Council of Constantinople also added to the creed the clauses which declare the Holy Spirit to be a person who ought to be worshipped equally with God and Jesus, leaving the Nicene Creed very nearly as it is now read, and thus for the first time establishing the Trinity as now understood by the so-called orthodox Christians.

The book trade of Alexandria gave the Egyptian opinions a great importance in the Christian world. All the oldest and best manuscripts of the Greek Bible now remaining were written by Alexandrian penmen, that of Paris, that of the Vatican, that of Cambridge, that of the British Museum, and that from 'Mount Sinai, now in Russia. In Alexandria were made the Ethiopic version, and probably the early Latin version. The Armenian version and the old Syriac version were corrected in Alexandria, from the most approved and earliest Greek text.

These are strong proofs of the rank which that city held, and of its power to guide the opinions of foreign Christians. Nor were corn and books the only products which other countries received from Egypt, either as tribute or by purchase.

About the middle of the fourth century there was a general digging up of the bodies of the most celebrated Christians of former ages to heal the diseases and strengthen the faith of the living. The tombs of Egypt, crowded with mummies which had lain there for centuries, could of course furnish relics more easily than most countries; and Constantinople then received from Egypt a quantity of bones, which were supposed to be those of the martyrs slain in the Pagan persecutions. The Archbishop, John Chrysostome, received them gratefully, and

p. 118

though himself smarting under the reproach that he was not orthodox, according to the measure of the superstitious Egyptians, he thanks God that Egypt, which sent forth its corn to feed its hungry neighbours, could also send the bodies of so many martyrs to sanctify their churches. And Gregory, of Nazianzus, a little before had remarked that Egypt was the most Christ-loving of countries, and adds, with true simplicity, that, wonderful to say, after having so lately worshipped bulls, goats, and crocodiles, it was now teaching the world the worship of the Trinity in the truest form.



Fig. 104.--Isis Rising Heliacally.

[Next: List of Woodcuts.](#)

LIST OF WOODCUTS.

FIG.

- [1.](#) The Winged Sun of Thebes.
- [2.](#) Amun-Ra.
- [3.](#) Mando.
- [4.](#) Hapimou, the Nile.
- [5.](#) Chem.
- [6.](#) Kneph.
- [7.](#) Pthah.
- [8.](#) Neith.
- [9.](#) Isis.
- [10.](#) Athor.
- [11.](#) Pasht.
- [12.](#) Thoth.
- [13.](#) Osiris.
- [14.](#) Horus.
- [15.](#) Anubis.
- [16.](#) Nephthys.
- [17.](#) Typhon.
- [18.](#) Chonso.
- [19.](#) Seb.
- [20.](#) Serapis.
- [21.](#) Amun-Ra, Maut, and Chonso.

- [22.](#) Horus between Isis and Nephthys.
- [23.](#) Rameses III. between Isis and Nephthys.
- [24.](#) Apis, the sacred bull.
- [25.](#) Uræus or Asp.
- [26.](#) Serapis.
- [27.](#) The title of Zera, *Son of the Sun*.
- [28.](#) The Birth of Amunothph III.
- [29.](#) The Tree of life and knowledge.
- [30.](#) A Column from Temple of Karnak.
- [31.](#) Plan of Temple of Errebek.
- [32.](#) Portico of the same.
- [33.](#) Plan of Temple of Seboua.
- [34.](#) Plan of Temple of Sarbout of Kadem.
- [35.](#) Portico of Contra-Latopolis.
- [36.](#) Portico of Tentyra restored.
- [37.](#) Plan of the Memnonium.
- [38.](#) View and plan of Temple of Philæ.
- [39.](#) Priest squatting on the ground.
- [40.](#) Crown of Upper Egypt.
- [41.](#) Crown of Lower Egypt.
- [42.](#) Double crown.
- [43.](#) Stone head-rest.
- [44.](#) Border of flower and fruit.
- [45, 46, 47.](#) Emblems of Urim and Thummim.
- [48.](#) The Ark.
- [49.](#) The Singer or Musician.

- [50.](#) The Prophet or Ventriloquist.
- [51.](#) The Scribe.
- [52.](#) The Serpent Charmer.
- [53.](#) A Priest carrying an hour-glass.
- [54.](#) Statue of a Pastophorus or Shrine-bearer.
- [55.](#) Procession of sacred boats.

[p. 120](#)
- [56.](#) Serpent on a standard.
- [57.](#) Divining cup.
- [58.](#) Priest with leopard skin.
- [59.](#) Votive Pyramid.
- [60.](#) The King, Queen, their Son, and Priests sacrificing.
- [61.](#) Pyramid of Chofo.
- [62.](#) Plan and section of tomb.
- [63.](#) King embracing a god.
- [64.](#) The Conquerors of the great serpent.
- [65.](#) Mummy with three cases.
- [66.](#) Four lesser gods of the dead.
- [67.](#) Isis and Nephthys grieving for the dead.
- [68.](#) Anubis laying out a mummy.
- [69.](#) Basin copied from a water-tank.
- [70.](#) The Trial of the dead.
- [71.](#) Gods mediating for the dead.
- [72.](#) Gods sacrificed as an atonement.
- [73.](#) Soul returning to the mummy.
- [74.](#) Animal body and spiritual body.

- [75.](#) Enemies under the soles of the shoes.
- Page [58.](#) Osiris, judge of the dead.
- Fig. [76.](#) Neith with outstretched wings as vault of heaven.
- [77.](#) Pigmy Pthah.
- [78.](#) The same with club.
- [79.](#) The same, Cabeiri and Pit of Fire.
- [80.](#) King appeasing the Cabeiri.
- [81.](#) Chiun with Chem and Ranpo. Anaita worshipped.
- [82.](#) Fire and water offered.
- [82a.](#) Ghosts.
- [p. 72.](#) Pit of Fire.
- Fig. [83.](#) Sun worship by Persian Satrap.
- [84.](#) Egyptian Ra altered with rays and hands.
- [p. 75.](#) Name of Thaomra.
- Fig. [85.](#) Eleusinian basket and serpent.
- Page [86.](#) Apis on coins of Cyprus.
- Fig. [86.](#) Horus as vault of heaven.
- [87.](#) Osiris-Horus-Ra.
- [88.](#) Pthah-Horus-Kneph.
- [89.](#) Horus as a child.
- [90.](#) Isis nursing Horus.
- [91.](#) Harpocrates.
- Page [91.](#) Egyptian gods in Malta.
- Fig. [92.](#) Serpents of good and evil.
- [93.](#) Serapis as serpent of evil.
- [94.](#) Serpent of Evil with glory.

- [95.](#) Serpent of Evil as Jao.
- [96.](#) Triangular gem.
- [97.](#) Trinity as a Sphinx.
- [98.](#) Conqueror over Evil on horseback.
- [99.](#) Spirit of Evil on horseback.
- [100.](#) Mithra.
- [101.](#) Figure of Jesus in a temple.
- [102.](#) St. Peter worshipped by Rameses II.
- [103.](#) Scarabæus and ball of dirt.
- [104.](#) Isis rising heliacally.

[Next: Author's Afterword](#)

p. 121

AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

THE study of error is often only a little less important than the study of truth. The history of the human mind. in its progress from ignorance towards knowledge should tell us the mistakes into which it has sometimes wandered, as well as its steps in the right path. We turn, indeed, with more pleasure to review the sources from which the world has gained any of its valuable truths, in the hope of there finding some further knowledge which may be equally valuable; while for our errors, so long as we are unwilling to acknowledge them to be errors, we too often shut our eyes, and refuse to be shown their origin.

The Emperor Marcus, Antoninus, in his philosophical work, mentions the several tutors and friends from whom he gained his good habits, and those views of life which he chiefly valued; but though we must suppose that he was aware of some failings in his character, he does not tell us to which of his companions he owed them. And so it is with the benefits of civilisation, arts, and religion; and also with the evils of superstition. Modern Europe readily acknowledges how many benefits it received from

p. 122

Rome, from Greece, and from Judea, but has been willing to forget how much of its superstition came from Egypt.

When Christians shall at length acknowledge that many of those doctrines, which together now make up orthodoxy, or the religion of the majority, as distinguished from the simple religion which Jesus taught and practised; when they shall acknowledge that many of them are so many sad and lamentable errors; then, and not till then, will they seek to know their origin, and enquire from which of the several branches of Paganism they sprung. They will then see that most of the so-called Christian doctrines, that have no place in the New Testament, reached Europe from Egypt, through Alexandria.

All nations borrow from others--at least, from those who are before them in the race of civilization. They borrow from each of their neighbours in those branches of knowledge in which they think they can do so wisely, and what they have taken often shows itself in the language. This can be best explained by instances from our own language. Thus, when we speak about the army, our words show that the French were our instructors in military matters, and we talk of "aide-de-camp," "chevaux de frise," "captain," "lieutenant," "ensign," "cadet."

When we speak of the church we use Latin words, as "vestry," "rector," "vicar," "curate," "incumbent," "ordination," "font," "creed," "doctrine."

Words more strictly religious are often Greek, as "baptism," "liturgy" "litany."

p. 123

The Italians gave us our words belonging to bookkeeping and banking, as "debtor," "creditor," "cambist," "ditto," "bankrupt," "usance."

The Spanish have given us a few words relating to their social life, such as "alcove," "verandah," "duenna."

From the Arabs, through scientific treatises, we have taken "almanach," "alchemy," "chemistry," "algebra."

The Italians also have given us many words relating to art, such as "mezzotint," "fresco-painting," "chiaroscuro," "pianoforte," "violoncello," "opera."

These few instances are, perhaps, enough to justify us in thinking that when the Greeks, Romans, and Jews have made use of Coptic words, it has arisen from their having borrowed these branches of knowledge from the Egyptians.

The aim of the following pages is not only to explain the Mythology of Egypt, but to show the extraordinary readiness with which its religious opinions were copied by the neighbouring nations, particularly by the Greeks and Romans. In matters of religion, the more ignorant part of those two nations bowed in reverence to the greater earnestness and seriousness of the Egyptians, who were at the same time so remarkably rich in mythological invention. Pagan Greece, received from Egypt all that part of its religion which related to a future state of rewards and punishments, and though Christian Greece was for a short time too intelligent to take the whole of the Egyptian mysticism and superstition, yet Christian Rome, from which our own opinions were chiefly learned, had no such hesitation, and was at all times a most willing pupil.

These facts may receive some explanation from two known laws of the human mind. First, among religious persons the fear of doing wrong makes them more afraid of falling into scepticism than into credulity; and those who believe more, whether they believe wisely or unwisely, are apt to think themselves on safer ground than those who believe less. In the case of a proposition in science, when the arguments for it and against it seem equal, the reasoner withholds his assent; but in the case of a religious dogma or article of faith, the mind in its weakness fancies it safer to accept it than to reject it. The reasoning powers are in part over-ruled by the feelings. In religious controversy, both parties, the believer and the doubter, usually feel that the reproach of disbelief, which it is in the power of one to throw against the other, hits a much harder blow than the reproach of credulity and superstition, which is all that the other can fling back again. It is only among irreligious persons and scoffers that the feelings strengthen the other side, and that disbelief can shut the door against argument by an equally blind and unfair claim to superiority. Hence arises the power which superstitious and complicated systems of

religions have of spreading themselves, and hence the weakness of good sense when setting up its simple truths against the encroachments of such many-sided errors.

Secondly, earnestness and sincerity are the most powerful helps by which we enforce our opinions and convert our neighbours. And there was far more real conviction of the truth of their religion among the Egyptians than among their Greek and Roman neighbours. Hence the

p. 125

opinions of the more ignorant lived and spread, while the opinions held with hollowness and insincerity by the more enlightened died away.

The following are the principal doctrines which are most certainly known to be common to Egyptian Mythology and modern orthodoxy, as distinguished from the religion of Jesus. They include the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and the atonement by vicarious sufferings.

1st. That the creation and government of the world is not the work of one simple and undivided Being, but of one God, made up of several persons. This is the doctrine of Plurality in Unity.

2nd. That happiness, or the favour of the judge of the living and the dead, could scarcely be hoped for, either from his justice or his mercy, unless an atoning sacrifice had been paid to him on our behalf, by a divine being; and that mankind, or some part of them, may hope to have their sins forgiven because of the merits and intercession of that being, and to be excused from punishment because he consented to be sacrificed for them. With the Egyptians there were four such chief mediators.

3rd. That among the gods, or persons which compose the godhead, one, though a god, could yet suffer pain and be put to death.

4th. That a god, a man, or being half god and half man, once lived upon earth, who had been born of an earthly mother, but without an earthly father.

It may amuse, while it will help our argument, to mention also a few of the less important Egyptian opinions

p. 126

which are still common among us. Trifles sometimes declare their origin more certainly than opinions and habits of greater importance, which may be thought common to the human mind. Among the most interesting is the wedding ring. The Egyptian gold, before the introduction of coinage, had been usually kept in the form of a ring; and the Egyptian at his marriage placed one of these pieces of gold on his wife's finger in token of his entrusting her with all his property. The early Christians, says Clemens, saw no harm in following this custom; and in our own marriage ceremony the man places the same plain ring

of gold on his bride's finger when he says, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow."

It was one of the duties of the priests of Philæ to purchase of the river Nile a bountiful overflow by throwing a piece of gold into the stream once a year, and hence, probably, the Venetians borrowed their custom of wedding the Adriatic by throwing a gold ring into the sea. At the same time the Doge's cap was copied from the crown of Lower Egypt.

Our Christmas game of drawing lots for the title of King and Queen, is Egyptian. It was called by the Alexandrians, as Julius Pollux tells us, the game of Basilinda; and Tacitus mentions the quarrel between Nero and Britannicus when they were playing at this game in Rome.

The Egyptian day for eating sugared cakes had been our twentieth of January, but in the fourth century, says Moses of Chorene, it was changed to be kept fourteen days earlier; and the sugared cake of the Egyptians now marks the feast of Epiphany, or Twelfth Night.

p. 127

When the Roman Catholic priest shaves the crown of his head, it is because the Egyptian priest had done the same before. When the English clergyman, though he preaches his sermon in a silk or woollen robe, may read the liturgy in no dress but linen, it is because linen was the clothing of the Egyptians. Two thousand years before the bishop of Rome pretended to hold the keys of heaven and earth, there was an Egyptian priest with the high-sounding title of Appointed keeper of the two doors of heaven, in the city of Thebes.

Christian art also owes much to the Egyptian imagination. The Virgin Mary rising to heaven, standing upon a crescent moon, very closely resembles Isis as the dog star rising heliacally (see Fig. [104](#)). The figure of the Almighty, with head and outstretched arms at the head of the picture, particularly in the early pictures, when the head hung downwards, is the same in design as that of Horus at the top of many a funeral papyrus (see page [87](#)). The figure of a triangle to represent the Trinity was clearly borrowed from Pagan Egypt (see page [99](#)).

The supposed arts of astrology and witchcraft were more particularly Egyptian; the conjuror's word of Abracadabra is a corruption of the Greek word Abrasax, which is itself a corruption of the Egyptian *hurt me not*, by which they hoped to warn off evil spirits; and fortunetellers are even yet called Egyptians or Gypsies. When Shakespeare brings upon the stage the queen of the witches, she bears the name of Hecate, one of the well-known names of Isis.

These fanciful customs and foolish opinions and traditions

p. 128

of art help to show that although the old Egyptian race has ceased to be a nation for more than twelve

hundred years, during which its history has been neglected, and its very existence often forgotten, yet the Egyptian mind still has a most important influence upon our modern civilisation. Protestant Europe is even now struggling to throw off the graver errors of the Nicene Creed and the Atonement, which Rome received from Egypt fifteen centuries ago.

HIGHBURY PLACE,

June, 1863.

~~~~~

This Second Edition has been enlarged to the extent of four pages by the MS. additions which the Author left ready for publication.

E. S.

1896.