

ON A GOLD PLATE, EMBOSSED WITH HIERO-
GLYPHICS, IN THE MUSEUM OF
JOSEPH MAYER, F.S.A, &c.

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THE museums of Europe have been enriched by a vast number of Egyptian treasures, brought from that country into the west from time to time; and though the specimens which have been thus imported are so numerous, too many lie forgotten and unnoticed on the now deserted floors of the wilderness cities, once the most magnificent in ancient Egypt. And it is very probable that many antiquities of the highest interest still lie thus hidden in the earth, for the wrecks of ancient Egyptian greatness have ever been found thus buried. These records (as far as we are at present acquainted with them) embrace, first, matters concerning the religious and political government of the state; and, secondly, those connected with the customs and usages of the various towns. Others, again, relate to the history of illustrious men, and even of private individuals. And not a few of them are full of sententious utterances which exhort to all kinds of learning and of virtue. Some of these writings are executed upon papyrus, and some upon stones; some upon linen, and some upon wood; some upon different metals, as brass, silver, gold, and alloys of these; and some, again, upon fragments of earthen vessels, and urns of baked clays. The greater part of the inscriptions are in hieroglyphics, but some in the demotic, and some in the hieratic characters. A most precious specimen of this class of antiquities is in the possession of Mr. Mayer, valuable alike from its material, which is pure gold, and from the intrinsic interest of its contents. It is a plate, 1 foot 10

inches long, by $7\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide, of the thickness of a sheet of cardboard, and has embossed upon it hieroglyphics emblematic of divinity, and of life and of death. It was found in a mummy case of some general of Upper Egypt. What his name was I know not, for the *ἐπιστήθιον*, as the plate is called, does not enable us to determine it. But it is likely that the mummy case contains the particular apophthegm of the general instead of his name (as was the custom among the Egyptians). If we had, then, a copy of the apophthegm, we could easily make out what sort of a man he was, and when he flourished; but I am not without hope that Mr. Mayer, who is so zealous in the pursuit of antiquities, may have a copy procured of the inscription referred to, which is still preserved in Egypt; and, also, of all the sacred writings which were inscribed in the case; for who knows, if this course be pursued, what historical truths we may not discover, which may reveal errors of historians of the present age. As, however, we unfortunately have not yet this information in our possession, let us commence by simply interpreting the symbolical writing on the breast-plate which lies before us.

Interpreted, the symbols read thus: "Having been clothed
 "with manhood by the Divine Power, I despised death often;
 "and having become at last a suppliant for true wisdom, and
 "having participated in it, I contemplated the might of Night
 "and of Day, and of Death and of Life. And, therefore,
 "among the living I remain, immortal, and my dust, fashioned
 "by Phthai, though corruptibly, yet of incorruptible clay, is
 "watched by heavenly guardians, till the time when it shall
 "again become, not this time the corruptible, but the incor-
 "ruptible abode of an immortal creation."

Thus runs the interpretation of the symbolical writings; but the sense being entirely metaphorical, must be elucidated in order to be thoroughly understood.

"Having been clothed with manhood by the Divine Power,"

that is, having been arrayed with power by God, I often despised the inevitable dangers which threaten our lives. For who that believes in the living God can die? None. Here the faith of this man in God is seen, and not in this record alone, for, in all the Egyptian monuments, reference to God is manifest. "And having become at last," etc., etc., that is, that first, while leading a military life, and always putting his trust in God, he despised the dangers of battle when engaged with his enemies, and afterwards, when he had left this arduous career, in his intercourse with the wise, he became truly enlightened, and perceived the real powers of nature. For to the light (that is the sun), and to the darkness (that is the moon), the Egyptians ascribed the cause of the creation and destruction of all corruptible things, as well as of the incorruptible body; and they called both these luminaries "ordained agencies." Thus, then, being instructed by the power of reason, he became acquainted with the force which rules in nature; that is to say, he understood that there is one God, who created all things, who preserves all things, and who maintains the universe in harmony. Having learned these things, and having faith in God, he obtained immortality, his spirit being taken to rank with the immortals. And my dust, says he, that is my body, which $\Phi\theta\alpha\tilde{\iota}$ (evidently $\Delta\eta\mu\iota\upsilon\rho\gamma\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, the Creator) fashioned corruptibly (for corruptible is all creation) of incorruptible clay, *i.e.*, of the elements of the earth (for this is incorruptible and eternal, all that is made from it returning to it again), is watched by heavenly guardians, that is, is guarded by those elements from which it proceeded, until its spirit, which was abiding with the immortals, returns to it, and then it will become the immortal dwelling of an immortal creation. He evidently believes that his body shall be raised again at a future day, and that the immortal spirit shall return to it, and live with it to all eternity.

From this last paragraph we have abundant evidence that the Egyptians, who also taught metempsychosis, were persuaded that those who lived virtuously should rise from the dead, both soul and body, and should live for ever.

And so they taught truth, even the truth of the Gospel. For the nation which became the teacher of the lawgiver of the Hebrews (as Scripture affirms) I mean of the Prophet Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, was likely to have some correct notions about God and the immortality of the soul. "He," says the high priest of the god *Χεμύα, Μάλχιε* son of Scethis, "is our ruler, he is our guardian; let us therefore love him from our heart, and those gods also who dwell in the same temple, and let us worship them with the unfeigned homage of our hearts, and in this we shall always be honoured and esteemed." Thus also the Apostle Paul preached to the Athenians, saying to them "In whom we live and move and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also His offspring. Inasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Areteus is the poet (quoted by Paul) who being in Egypt, and being taught for a considerable time by the Egyptians, obtained many correct views, which he translated into Greek, and gave to his countrymen the purity of the doctrine of the Egyptians as to the omnipotence of God, is attested not only by the words of the high priest Malchis, but also by many other apophthegms of the priests, and especially by the following inscription, which is written, generally near the god Ammon, in hieratic characters, and which being interpreted runs thus:—"I am the inward and self-begotten; I bring forward invisible things from the invisible world into light by a word, both to have beginning and existence: all things visible and invisible are by my word, by which also are upheld all

“ things corruptible and incorruptible.” The spirit breathed by this sentence differs in no respect from that of the sacred writings, for it ascribes the existence of all things to one God, eternal, invisible and self-begotten, whom the Egyptians specially called Ammaa and Thamaa.

The Egyptian nation, then, held similar doctrines to the above, and especially insisted that the god Thothis (evidently the word of God) enjoins all mortals to worship God, the Maker of all ; and their attention was directed rather to the future than to mortal affairs.*

I could still further elucidate the foregoing apophthegm, but this will suffice for the present. When, at some future time, I revert to the subject, it will be in greater detail.

We must warmly congratulate Mr. Mayer, the lover of antiquity, on his possession of this treasure, from which we have elicited some important matters hitherto unknown.

It will be seen, by the preceding remarks that the Egyptian remains afford great interest, especially on subjects connected with ethics, and that they may be rendered extremely useful to literature, if properly interpreted.

These truths the noble Plato, and Pythagoras before him, with Anaxagoras, and others of the ancient sages, acknowledged, and they became what they were by appropriating the spirit of these writings. The Egyptologers of our time publish continually bulky volumes of reproductions of Egyptian writings, but they throw no further light upon the matter than to tell us, “ This is $\Phi\theta\alpha\iota$, this is Ammon, this is Osiris—Osiris and nothing more.” They say that all the records of the Egyptians contain nothing but proper names ; and they

* Chenophis, son of Orus and a native of Panopolis, says in his Book of Sacred Apophthegms, that the sentence which we have been discussing, was often quoted by Thousochis, sister's son of Smendis, the King of Egypt, the first of the 20th dynasty (according to Manetho of Sebennes) who also reigned as viceroy of the Thebaid 32 years. Uranius of Alexandria, Manetho of Alexandria, and Chara of Nancrotia make the same statement.

give lengthy and laughable catalogues of these names; but the symbolical they seem entirely ignorant of, and neglect totally. May we be preserved from the errors of such men (who conceal and disguise the truth as they think fit), and may we be enabled to gain a clear knowledge of the mystery of the early ages of this world, over which the Almighty Power reigns supreme. And so to the Creator and Governor of all, be glory, now and for evermore!
