
THE BELIEF OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS RESPECTING A FUTURE STATE.—*By the Reverend J. Douglas.*

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The Egyptians were the most religious of the historical nations of antiquity, possessing a better claim to that epithet than the mere practice of a gorgeous ritual (in which alone, however, most ancient religions consisted) could bestow. A deep reverential awe towards an unseen but overruling Power pervaded their national feelings, and gave its impress to their national institutions: a firm belief in a future state was not only held as an article of religious faith but permitted to exert an influence over their lives; and the alliance between religion and ethics was so far recognized and enforced, that upright conduct, not wisdom or noble descent, was considered to afford the only claim to esteem in the world, and the only passport to the "land of the West." In this, as in all other respects they differed from the Greeks, in whose mind there was ever a vague reverence for something, but who were religious only in so far

as religion could be made subservient to poetry and art; and from the Romans, who patronized religion as a political engine, but never looked upon morals as an essential element in it.

Egyptian mythology, likewise, was throughout purer than those of Europe. The gods of the first order were deifications of the various productive principles of nature; the second order consisted of their offspring; while the central deity of the third—Osiris—was the divine representative of pure goodness; who, as his legends relate, though a god at first, came on earth, was slain by Typho, the evil being, only to reassume his divine functions as “Lord of the West,” and judge of the dead in the Hall of Amente. In this capacity he was worshipped with the members of his family throughout Egypt, and was in fact the only deity to whom universal reverence was paid. In all the temples his name is found with those of the local triad; and certain of his mysteries were necessarily celebrated everywhere, being associated with death. It is with these, and the belief which they indicate that we have partly to deal, and they will best illustrate the moral character of Egyptian mythology.

No little obscurity still hangs over the precise belief of the Egyptians respecting a future state,

nor need we wonder that it should be so. It would be impossible to gather a clear and definite idea of the supposed condition of the soul after death, from either Grecian or Buddhist mythology. The attempt to reduce religious knowledge, still more, dim religious intuitions, to logical formulæ has seldom succeeded, and was probably unattempted by the Egyptians. The fragments of their sacred books which have reached us, add less than might have been expected, to our real acquaintance with their mythological system, as they generally contain little else than mystical apostrophe to the Deity. Whenever they were able, however, to represent a doctrine pictorially, it is done graphically and intelligibly. Their employment of hieroglyphical symbols in writing had made them such masters of the art of pictorial description that it may be doubted, whether any people has ever attained the power of depicting facts as vividly as they.

From the sculptures and paintings on their temple walls and tombs, as well as from many notices in their ritual, it is evident that they regarded the future life as a state of retribution, and looked forward to a judgment before the god Osiris, to which all must be subjected, ere they could be admitted to a participation in the divine

nature. But while the soul was undergoing this ordeal in the invisible world, the body passed through a similar trial, previous to its burial; and the scene transacted by the priests on the banks of their sacred lake bore some resemblance to that thought to be taking place in the presence of Osiris. After the embalmment had been completed, and the tomb prepared, the body, accompanied by the relations and a band of hired mourners, was drawn to the borders of the sacred lake, of which there was one in every *nome* or province. "There," according to Diodorus, "forty-two judges having been assembled and placed in a semicircle, near the banks of the lake, a boat was brought up, provided expressly for the occasion, under a boatman, called in the Egyptian language Charon. When the boat was ready for the reception of the coffin, it was lawful for any person who thought proper to bring forward his accusation against the deceased. If it could be proved that he had led an evil life, the judges declared accordingly, and the body was deprived of the accustomed sepulture; but if the accuser failed to establish what he had advanced, he was subjected to the heaviest penalties. When there was no accuser or when the accusation had been disproved, the relations ceased from their lamentations and pronounced encomiums on the deceased. They did not enlarge upon his descent, as is usual

among the Greeks, for they held that all Egyptians were equally noble (*an explanation which can be hardly correct, as the system of castes was firmly established in Egypt from the earliest times*) ; but they related his early education and the course of his studies : and then praising his piety and justice in manhood, his temperance and the other virtues he possessed, they supplicated the Gods to receive him as a companion of the pious. This announcement was received by the assembled multitude with acclamations, and they joined in extolling the glory of the deceased, who was about to remain forever with the virtuous in the regions of Hades. The body was then taken up by those who had family catacombs prepared, and placed in the repository allotted to it."

Not only had the remains of the lowest to undergo this public trial,—those even of monarchs were exposed to the judgment of their people. Nor was it in their case any more than in that of others an empty show, which always terminated in the acquittal of their memory from all blame ; as there is reason to think, from the erasure of their names from the catacombs which they had excavated for themselves during life, that the bodies of more than one Pharaoh never obtained burial. The sentence, however, seems not in all instances, to have been irrevocable ; for upon their rejection, those who were able to possess the cases in which mummies

were placed, while still in the house before burial, restored them to these, till expiation had been made for their sins by sacrifice and the donation of money to the priests :—but the poor were probably at once buried on the shores of the lake, where traces of extensive cemeteries are still found.

The ignominy of such a public refusal of the right of burial must have exerted a beneficial restraint throughout life ; but such a prudential motive did not suggest the institution of the trial. It more probably originated in the reverence which the Egyptians felt towards the body as the seat of life, and its supposed participation therefore in the sin of the soul. A connection, however, was believed still to subsist after death, between the disembodied spirit and its former tenement ; and in this belief we find the strongest reasons, not only for their posthumous judgment of the body, but for the care with which they endeavoured to preserve it from decay ; for the expense which they went to, not only in adorning its resting place, but in storing it with the necessaries of life, and the objects in which the deceased took pleasure ; and for the correspondence in several points between the judgment of the body on earth and that of the soul before Osiris in the Hall of Amente.

The judgment of Osiris was often represented on the lids of mummy cases ; on the walls of the Temples and Tombs ; and in the “ Book of the

Dead"—the only one of the sacred Book or Books of Hermes, which has yet been discovered and read. The largest and most complete of those on the monuments is in the side Adytum of the Ptolemaic Temple of Dayr el Medineh—a small Temple devoted to funereal rights and situated in a desolate valley behind the plain of Thebes. The scene occupies the whole of one wall, being fourteen feet long by eight feet high.* The deceased is being ushered into the "Hall of the Two Truths" by the Goddess Thmei in her double capacity as divine representative of Truth and Justice. In his right hand he holds an ostrich feather—her symbol—in token of self-justification, and raises the other in an attitude of supplication, while he pleads his innocence of any grievous sin. Thmei's office in the lower world was "Keeper of the Gates of Truth," not as exercising herself the capacity of Judge;—but as excluding all falsehood and injustice. Her attributes, therefore, belong peculiarly to Osiris and the other judges who all wear them, the former on either side of his Pschent or Crown, the latter like Thmei herself—on the head.

In front of the deceased stands a balance, one

* This description was illustrated by paper casts of this very judgment scene; which was made by pressing damped paper, containing but little sizing, upon the sculptured wall of the temple, and allowing it to remain attached till quite dry. When removed the whole subject was so distinctly impressed that every hieroglyph could be clearly traced, even on its arrival here.

of whose scales contains a jar holding his heart, (it being considered the seat of the affections, and therefore the source of virtue and vice,) the other an ostrich feather, the emblem again of Thmei. The weighing of his actions is superintended by Horus the hawk-headed divinity, and Anubis the jackal-headed—the one the conductor of the dead into Amente, the other their accuser. Of the result the forty-two figures, (who occupy two lines along the whole top of the scene,) each the avenger of a separate sin, are with Osiris the judges. This result is recorded on a papyrus roll by Thoth, the god of letters and the scribe of the other world. The roll when full is given to Osiris who thereupon pronounces sentence. The gate of the mansion of Osiris is guarded by Cerberus, an ugly monster with glaring eyes and open mouth; but before it sits, in the crook of Osiris, the emblem of dominion, Harpocrates his son. He was so called by the Greeks through a mistaken notion of the meaning of an attitude in which he is often represented, viz, with his finger to his lips: an attitude never significant of silence but always of youth,—and given therefore to the offspring, whether of gods or men. This being his attribute, the position which he occupies at the gate of the mansion of Osiris indicates the correct belief of the Egyptians as to the nature of dissolution, which is not death but a new life, a restoration to eternal youth, a resuscitation and not annihilation.

On a lotus bud, springing from the throne of Osiris, are the four genii of Amente, in the form of the four jars in which were preserved *viscera* of the deceased. These genii were probably only subordinate forms of Osiris, whose name they bear; but they always appear with the heads of the four principal deities of the lower regions, **AMSET** with the head of Osiris a human head, either male or female; **HAPI** with the head of Thoth, a monkey's head, which he wore as well as that of the ibis, which characterises him as god of letters; **SMAUTF** with the head of Anubis, the jackal's head; and **KEBHSEN** with the head of Horus, a hawk's head. To them was committed the care of the *viscera* of the dead. These, in high class mummies, were embalmed separately, and placed in stone jars, sometimes of the most costly alabaster, whose lids were sculptured with the heads of the genii. The jars were buried with the mummy in the tomb. Where such expense could not be afforded by the friends of the dead, imitation jars but solid, made of pottery or wood, were substituted: and inside the mummies of the poorest class, into which the *viscera* were replaced, there are found little figures of the genii cast in wax or pottery.

Between the genii and Osiris, a panther's skin is suspended in mid air, emblematic probably of

the sanctity of the Deity ; as a panther's skin is always worn by the priests of the higher orders.

The forty-two judges, termed by Wilkinson the *Assessors*, are always represented with human bodies and different heads, though the variation is not in all cases the same. Generally the first had the head of a hawk, the second of a man, the third of a hare, the fourth of a hippopotamus, the fifth of a man, the sixth of a hawk, the seventh of a fox, the eighth of a man, the ninth of a ram, the tenth of a snake, and so forth in obedience to a rule which we do not understand, as the order is by no means invariable.

The forty-two sins specially recognized by the moral code of the Egyptians, and of which the deceased must prove himself innocent before Osiris and his assessors, are enumerated in the "Book of the Dead," and with the speech which introduces them, supposed to be addressed to the judges, affords us one of the most interesting results of hieroglyphical study. The passage has been read by Birch, and is introduced into Bunsen's "Egypt's Place in Universal History," (Vol. IV. 644.) It abounds with allusions whose meaning is by no means clear, and is a striking example of the strange confusion of ethics and ritualism, which was sure to result from their confused knowledge of right and wrong :—

“ Oh, ye Lords of Truth!—Oh, thou great God, Lord of Truth! I have come to thee, my Lord, I have brought myself to see thy blessing—I have known thy name, I have known the names of the forty-two of the gods who are with thee in the Hall of the Two Truths, living by catching the wicked; fed off their blood; the day of avenging words, before the good Being, the justified.—Placer of spirits, Lord of Truth, is thy name.

“ Oh, ye Lords of Truth! let me know ye.—I have brought ye truth. Rab ye away my faults.”

Then commences his self-justification in general terms, which he concludes by appealing to each of the assessors as follows :

- 1.—I have not been idle.
- 2.—I have not way-laid.
- 3.—I have not boasted.
- 4.—I have not stolen.
- 5.—I have not smitten men privily.
- 6.—I have not counterfeited rings or measures.
- 7.—I have not played the hypocrite.
- 8.—I have not stolen the things of the gods.
- 9.—I have not told falsehoods.
- 10.—I have not spared eating bread.
- 11.—I have not caused (*any*) to weep.
- 12.—I have not rejected.
- 13.—I have not been idle.
- 14.—I have not eaten the heart.
- 15.—I have not plundered.
- 16.—I have not killed sacred beasts. (*A crime punishable in Egypt by death*).
- 17.—I have not made conspiracies.
- 18.—I have not robbed the streams.
- 19.—I have not listened

- 20.—I have not let my mouth wander.
 21.—I have not taken a tittle of things.
 22.—I have not corrupted the wife of another.
 23.—I have not polluted myself.
 24.—I have not caused fear.
 25.—I have not plundered. (*The same was made to a different Deity in number 15.*)
 26.—I have not burned my mouth.
 27.—I have not been inattentive to the words of truth.
 28.—I have not blasphemed.
 29.—I have not put forth my arm.
 30.—I have not made delays or dawdled.
 31.—I have not hastened my heart.
 32.—I have not clipped the skins of the sacred beasts.
 33.—I have not multiplied words in speaking.
 34.—I have not lied or done any wicked sin.
 35.—I have not reviled the face of the king or of my father.
 36.—I have not defiled the river.
 37.—I have not made loud words.
 38.—I have not blasphemed a God.
 39.—I have not injured the Gods, or calumniated the slave to his master.
 40.—I have not laid plans, I have not made his account, I have not ordered.
 41.—I have not augmented plans, I have not taken the clothes of the dead.
 42.—I have not despised a God in my heart, or to his face, or in things.

What a marvelous commingling of the frivolous and important, of the spiritual and grossly material, of right and wrong : what a picture of paganism with its mass of falsehood and its few grains of truth ! Yet, with-all, how much more

ennobling must this worship of Osiris have been than any form which that of the powers of nature ever took : for it, at least, recognizes something beneath the external coating of things in both man and nature—that there is a great all-presiding Spirit,—a Lord,—a Judge,—a Father,—and that man is more than his mere creature, and therefore related to him by other ties than bind all things else to him ; and it asserts throughout man's moral responsibility.

While, however, still clinging to self-righteousness as a ground of justification, the soul yet trusts to the mercy of Osiris, in his character of Father, for the forgiveness of sin, as constantly recurring allusions in the ritual evince ; and at length forces itself into the presence of its Father, despite the restraint of nature and the evil God, *Sut* or sin.

The following extract seems to indicate some such belief or expectation :—

“ O Soul, greatest of created Beings, let me come, having seen and passed ; having passed the gate to see my Father Osiris, I am his beloved ; I have come to see my Father Osiris. I slay the heart of *Sut*. I do the things of my Father Osiris. I have opened every door in heaven and earth. I am his beloved son. I have come from the dead an instructed spirit. Oh, every God and Goddess ! I have come along.”

The expression, “ I have come from the dead an instructed spirit,” refers probably to the belief in metempsychosis—the second great article of

their creed, respecting a future state. Yet it is uncertain what particular form of this variously modified doctrine they hold ; or whether their ideas respecting it were not so vague and contradictory as to render it impossible to reduce them to a systematic article. Pherecydes and his pupil Pythagoras, borrowed it from the Egyptians, but may have taught it in an altered shape. Plato, likewise, enunciates the same doctrine in the Phaedro ; and it is admitted by all the Grecian and Roman historians, who wrote of Egypt, to have been the universal belief there, and to have been thence introduced into Greece. According to Herodotus, (II. 23) “ the Egyptians were the first to maintain that the soul of man is immortal, and that after the death of the body, it always enters into that of an animal, which is then born ; but when it has passed through all those of the earth, and the sea and the air, it enters the body of a man and is born again, which circuit it accomplishes in 3000 years.” Plato may have combined the original Egyptian notion, with the poetical idea of Pindar, when he fixes the duration of the cycle of necessity at 10,000, except in the case of those “ who have philosophised sincerely, and together with philosophy, have loved beautiful forms. These indeed, if they have thrice chosen this mode of life in succession, shall in the three thousandth year, fly away to their pristine abode,”

(a metaphor borrowed from the Egyptian emblem of the soul, a bird with outstretched wings and human heart.)

But before the doctrine had passed through the imaginative minds of the Greeks and been moulded to suit their fanciful systems, it had doubtless, so far lost its Egyptian character, as to be a most unreliable guide in arriving at a correct opinion of its primitive form. The references also, to the wandering of the soul, which occur in such Papyri as have been read, shed but a dim light upon it; if indeed, they do not increase the confusion by compelling us to abandon many of the feasible explanations, which we had before framed of our mere scanty materials: while the mystical sculptures which cover the walls, pillars and roofs of the tombs and probably in most cases refer to this cardinal article of belief, are quite unintelligible. Yet the very obscurity which shrouded it and the scope therefore which it offered to fancy, gave it a deeper hold on the convictions of the people, and thus heightened the influence which it exerted in their habits and customs. To it may be traced their animal worship; for how could they otherwise than hold sacred or at least respect the life of an animal in which the soul of an ancestor

might at that moment be residing * : and it probably impressed on their architecture that character of massive durability which so prominently distinguishes it ; for they must naturally have aimed at erecting buildings which should have undergone no change, when they returned to inhabit them or worship in them at the expiry of their wanderings.

But when we come to enquire what place the judgment holds in the sequence of these events, and when the justified soul was supposed to be absorbed into the Deity and become Osiris, we are left in the same uncertainty in which they probably found themselves. That the condemned soul was doomed to pass through the bodies of unclean animals, whose habits resembled its propensities when on earth—and that therefore the doctrine possessed a judicial character,—seems to be established by an interesting scene on the tomb of Ramises V, where the soul of one, banished from the presence of Osiris, is being conveyed away in a boat by two monkey-headed divinities, under the form of a swine. But yet even the justified appear to have been obliged to undergo a certain number of migrations—perhaps after the formal judgment, or more probably after a

* It may be thought that the reverence paid already to animals suggested the doctrine of metempsychosis. Till better acquainted with the early development of the mythology, all speculation is little better than guess-work.

tacit judgment of their own consciences—as a purgatorial process, preparatory to their final admission to the abode of Osiris :—with this difference however, that they may have had the privilege of choosing such forms as they wished to assume. This view rests however on debateable grounds,—being unsupported by other evidence than the contents of a Papyrus, read in 1852 by M. de Rougé and published in the *Revue Archéologique*. It is a Novel, the plot of which is founded on this very doctrine, the hero being, during the important period of the narrative, a wandering spirit, and the machinery a strange intermixture of the natural and supernatural. It was written contemporaneously with the Books of Moses, and certain parts of its contents and style should occupy a foremost place among the evidences for the authenticity of these records. The state of society which it describes is precisely that which we should imagine it, from the narrative of Moses, to have been during Israel's sojourn there ; and the style much resembles that of the Pentateuch, being concise, epigrammatic, and abounding in repetition.

The nature of the composition renders it doubtful, how far it may be relied on as explanatory of the popular belief: for in ancient and modern literature there have been many strange stories told of what no one believes. Yet it is improbable that

the only romance of that far distant period upon which we happen to have lighted should be an exception to the general rule.

It narrates the mysterious spirit-life of a soul, which yet holds intercourse with earth through a material body; its wrongs, and its revenge, by means of metempsychosis. To attain this object it assumes in succession the forms of a sacred bull and a *perseas* tree, but at length returns to that of a man; when it succeeds in wreaking the vengeance which it sought to bring down upon its victim.

Egyptian records, however, further teach us that after all these dark and troublous wanderings the soul passes through the gloom of death to Osiris, and at length and for ever rests in him.

The ardent longings which their whole belief displays were the offspring of a deeply rooted dissatisfaction with this life, and an aspiration towards the knowledge and attainment of another. In the midst, therefore, of all the absurdities which their misguided imagination created, may we not trace unconscious prophecies of that clear revelation of life and immortality, which God has mercifully made to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

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