

It must be allowed, that those monuments which remain to us of the works of art among the Egyptians, though venerable on account of their antiquity, and sometimes exhibiting a grand and sublime appearance from their immensity, are extremely defective in beauty and elegance. How infinitely inferior, in point of taste, are the pyramids, the obelisks, the sphynx and colossal statues, the pillars of Luxor, to the simplest remains of the ancient temples in Greece! In architecture, one of the most obvious inventions, and one of the greatest improvements, both in point of utility and beauty, the construction of an arch, was quite unknown to the Egyptians. This defect gives an awkward and heavy appearance to their buildings, and must have occasioned a vast expense of labor, which might otherwise have been spared. In the arts of painting and sculpture, those specimens, of which a vast number have remained entire to our days, are, in general, greatly deficient in elegance and beauty. In the Egyptian statues, we may observe a perfect knowledge of the human proportions, but without any capacity in the artist to give to his figures animation or action. We may remark, in general, with regard to the remains of the arts in Egypt, that they either occasion surprise from their immensity, and the prodigious labor and cost employed in their construction, or are objects of curiosity on account of the very early period at which they were executed; but, considered as objects of taste, they afford but a small degree of pleasure to the critical eye.

As the Egyptians were more early acquainted than any other nations of antiquity with the useful, and even the elegant arts, they were no less eminent for their early cultivation of the sciences. The arts and sciences are indeed so intimately connected, that there can be no great progress in the one, without a proportional advancement in the other; as for example, architecture, which requires a knowledge of geometry and the laws of mechanics; the working of metals, dyeing, which presuppose an acquaintance with chemical principles. "When we see," says Millot, "the Egyptians surveying their lands with precision, distributing the waters of the Nile by numberless canals, measuring with exactness the increase of the river, making and employing various species of machinery, measuring time, and calculating the revolutions of the stars, we must suppose them to have attained a considerable proficiency in the science of mathematics. The Egyp-

who will take the pains to remove the sand on the south side, will there find the solid rock hewn into steps. And in the roof of the large chamber, where the sarcophagus stands, as also in the top of the roof of the gallery, as you go up into the chamber, you see large fragments of the rock; affording an unanswerable proof, that those pyramids were once huge rocks, standing where they now are; that some of them, the most proper from their form, were chosen for the body of the pyramid, and the others hewn down into steps, to serve for the superstructure, and the exterior parts of them."—Bruce's *Travels into Egypt and Abyssinia*, vol. i.

tians understood the division of the zodiac into twelve signs, which argues a considerable advancement in astronomy. They were able to calculate both solar and lunar eclipses. Thales, who owed all his astronomical knowledge to the Egyptians, predicted that famous eclipse of the sun 585 years before the Christian era, which separated the armies of the Medes and Lydians at the moment of an engagement. The position of the pyramids, most exactly corresponding to the four cardinal points, is, not without reason, urged as a proof of the knowledge of the Egyptians in astronomy; for it requires, even at present, no mean knowledge in that science to trace a meridian line with perfect accuracy. It is probable, too, that the Egyptians had an idea of the motion of the earth, since Pythagoras, who has given plain intimations of that opinion, is known to have acquired his astronomical knowledge in that country."

I have already taken notice of the very limited knowledge which the Egyptians possessed of medicine till the age of the Ptolemies, when an anatomical school was founded at Alexandria.

With regard to their philosophical opinions, they maintained themselves so mysterious a silence, and the accounts of those few of the ancients who were admitted to a knowledge of their mysteries are so obscure and imperfect, that it is, at this day, scarcely possible to attain to any distinct ideas regarding either their moral, physical, or theological doctrines. On the one hand, it seems a plain inference, that if the morality taught by the priests was not more pure than what was practised by the people, the Egyptians would certainly merit on that score no encomium. On the other hand, we must conclude, that if the moral doctrines of Pythagoras and of Plato, who both studied in Egypt, were learned in that school, their speculative opinions were right, whatever we may judge of their practice. In theology, too, while the superstitious worship of the common people was so grossly absurd as to draw on them the ridicule of all other nations, the secret doctrines of the priests are generally allowed to have been pure, refined, and rational. One Great Intelligence was supposed to preside over all nature. Subordinate spirits, portions of that Intelligence, presided over the actions of mankind, as the guardians of the human soul, which was derived from the same divine original, but was destined to undergo a certain number of transmigrations through different bodies, before it was reunited to the great parent-spirit. They believed in the immortality of the soul. Diodorus tells us that they esteemed the present state of existence to be of no value in comparison with that which was to come, and which was to be the reward of a life spent in this world in the practice of virtue.

The Egyptians supposed the material world to have arisen from the joint operation of three principles. The first was the Great Intelligence or universal spirit—the *anima mundi*—which gives form to the universe and to all its parts. The second was Matter,

which they supposed to have existed from all eternity. The third was the Nature of that Matter, which, from its imperfection, opposed that good which the universal spirit always aimed at producing, and frequently contaminated his works with evil. To these three principles, in their mythology, they gave the appellations of Osiris, Isis, and Typhon. The priests illustrated these radical doctrines by numberless allegories and fables, which, being literally received by the vulgar, produced a thousand absurdities in their worship and opinions, while the real meaning was known but to a few.

We have seen in the Egyptians, a people remarkable for their early civilization—for the antiquity of their government, the systematic order of their civil policy, the wisdom of many of their laws, and their singular progress in the arts—at a period when almost all the nations of the earth were sunk in ignorance and barbarism. It must, therefore, without doubt, appear extraordinary that, with all these advantages, the character of this people was held extremely low, and even despicable among the contemporary nations of antiquity. This peculiarity may, perhaps, be traced up to a single cause. They were a people who chose to sequester themselves from the rest of mankind, and obstinately or fastidiously refused all correspondence with other nations. They were not known to them by their conquests; they had no connection with them by their commerce; and they had a rooted antipathy to the manners, and even to the persons of all strangers.

To illustrate the preceding observation: the Egyptians, properly speaking, were never a military people. The foreign conquests of Sesostris have been much vaunted by some of the ancient historians, and have in part at least, obtained credit with some of the moderns. It may, perhaps, appear a blamable degree of scepticism to doubt the reality of those distant expeditions of Sesostris altogether; yet for three reasons I should incline to that opinion. The first is, that such expeditions must have required such extensive armaments as the country of Egypt at no period of its history could ever have furnished. The army of Sesostris which he led into Asia is said to have amounted to 600,000 foot, 24,000 horse, and 27,000 armed chariots: a force which it may be boldly averred is ten times beyond what the narrow territory of Egypt could ever have maintained or equipped. Secondly, no reasonable motive could urge a sovereign of Egypt to adopt such projects of conquest, to which the national character of his people and their extraordinary prejudices must have offered the strongest resistance. And, lastly, it has never been pretended that the Egyptians gained the smallest accession of territory, or derived any advantage whatever from those prodigious conquests. In every authentic period of their history, the character of this African people has been feeble and unwarlike. They had a strong turn to the arts of peace; and sought to provide for that security which is favorable

to them, by keeping on foot a pretty numerous militia, for defence in case of invasion from other nations; but even this with little effect, for they were successively subdued, and enslaved by almost all the predominant powers of antiquity.

With regard to any intercourse with other nations by commerce, the Egyptians had so little genius of that sort, that while the Red Sea was left open to all the maritime nations who chose to frequent it, they would not suffer any of those foreign vessels to enter an Egyptian port. They had no ships of their own, for their country produced no timber fit for the construction even of the small boats employed in navigating the Nile, which obliged them to use baked earth for that purpose, and sometimes reeds covered with varnish. They held the sea in detestation, from a religious prejudice, and they avoided all intercourse with mariners. We may judge, then, with what probability the ancient writers tell us of the naval armament of Sesostris, consisting of 400 long ships of war. Whence came the timber, whence the skill to construct them, and whence the mariners to navigate them?

Towards the decline of the Egyptian monarchy, the sovereigns of that country began to pay some attention to commerce. Bocchoris, who reigned about 670 years before the Christian era, published, as Diodorus informs us, some very wise laws relative to that object; and in this he was imitated by some of the succeeding princes. Psammeticus, who lived about a century after him, encouraged foreign nations to resort to the Egyptian ports, and allowed some Greeks to form commercial settlements upon the coasts. Nechos, his successor, with the same view, attempted the renewal of a project, which is said to have been first conceived by Sesostris, of joining the Red Sea with the Mediterranean by a canal from one of the branches of the Nile; but this great work was not completed till 400 years afterwards, by Ptolemy Philadelphus.* The genius of Nechos was extremely opposite to the general character of his people. He is said to have equipped a fleet on the Red Sea, which he wisely manned with Phœnician navigators, with instructions to circumnavigate the continent of Africa, a voyage which we are told they accomplished in three years; a fact, which, considering the period of time (610 B. C.) we need not add, is altogether incredible.

The singularity of the Egyptians with respect to manners, and their obstinate attachment to customs and practices, many of them repugnant to reason and the ordinary feelings of mankind, contributed more than any other cause to draw on them the aversion, and excite the ridicule of other nations. They had not only, as already remarked, an antipathy to all strangers; but some of their

* A part of this canal is still visible, running from Cairo to the north-east of the Berkel-el-Hadj, or, Lake of the Pilgrims, where it loses itself.

regulations seem calculated to encourage political disunion, and dislike to each other. All professions in Egypt were hereditary, a piece of policy which has received from some authors much encomium, but which deserves much more to be condemned than applauded. If the same dispositions and the same talents descended invariably from father to son, we might agree with M. Bossuet in holding it presumable, that men would execute in greater perfection what they had always seen done, and what had been their sole employment from infancy; but daily experience shows that neither talents nor inclinations are invariably hereditary, and therefore the argument is futile. But not only were all professions hereditary among this people; the rank and dignity of each was most scrupulously settled, nor could any eminence of merit, or of fortune, entitle an individual to higher respect or honor than what belonged to the meanest of his class; a policy repressive of all emulation, and of that generous ambition on which every species of excellence depends; while, at the same time, it was a fertile source of jealousy, animosity, and disunion.

Another species of the most pernicious policy among the Egyptians, which contributed not only to render them contemptible to other nations, but to foment discords among themselves, was the variety and difference of the objects of religious worship in the different provinces of the kingdom. The same animals that were regarded, in one province, with the most superstitious reverence, were, in another, the objects of detestation and abhorrence. In one quarter, they tamed the crocodiles, adorned them with gold and jewels, and worshipped them; in another, they killed those animals without mercy. In one province, the most sacred animal was a dog; in another, they reckoned dog's flesh the most delicate food. Cats were adored in one district, and rats in another. From these differences arose perpetual and violent animosities; for there are no contentions so rancorous as those which spring from the most trifling differences in religious worship or opinion. "The multitude," says Diodorus, "have been often inflamed into the highest pitch of fury, on account of the sacrilegious murder of a *divine cat*."

The extravagant length to which the Egyptians carried their veneration for their consecrated animals exceeds all belief. The sacred crocodile, the dog, or the cat, were kept in an enclosed space set apart, adjoining to the temples dedicated to their worship. They were constantly attended by men of the highest rank, whose business was to provide them in the choicest victuals, which they were at pains to dress in the manner they supposed most agreeable to their palate. They washed them in warm baths, and anointed them with the richest perfumes. The finest carpets were spread for them to lie on: chains of gold and circlets of precious stones were hung around their legs and necks: and when the stupid animal, insensible of the honors that were bestowed on him,

died like the rest of his kind, the whole province was filled with lamentation; and not only the fortunes of the priests, but the public revenue was without scruple expended in the performance of the most sumptuous funeral obsequies.

It is not then to be wondered that the superstitions of the Egyptians were a copious subject of ridicule to other nations of antiquity, and contributed to degrade them in the opinion of those whose objects of religious worship, if not fundamentally more rational, were less ludicrous, less childish and unmanly. What could they think of a nation, where, as Herodotus tells us, if a house was on fire, the father of a family would take more pains to save his cats than his wife and children; where a mother would be transported with joy at the news of her child being devoured by a crocodile; or where the soldiers, returning from a military expedition, would come home loaded with a precious booty of dogs, cats, hawks, and vultures?

The general character of the Egyptians, with respect to morals, contributed likewise to draw upon them the disesteem of other nations. They have been generally accused by the ancients of great cunning and insincerity in their dealings. The term *Αγριπτερευειν* (to play the Egyptian,) was proverbially used by the Greeks to signify *cozening* and *overreaching*. The contempt they expressed for strangers naturally stamped them with the character of a vain and insolent people. Pliny, in his Panegyric on Trajan, terms them *ventosa et insolens natio*. With respect to modesty and decorum, their manners were shamefully loose. In the festivals in honor of their gods, they committed such indecencies, that Herodotus, Diodorus, and others of the ancient writers, not over delicate themselves, have expressed a reluctance to enter into particular details.

Upon the whole, we may sum up in a few words the character of the Egyptians. They were a people remarkable for their early civilization, and for the systematic arrangement of their government and civil policy; though many of their particular institutions and usages were extremely faulty and impolitic. Their early subjection to laws, and their acquaintance with the arts and sciences, attracted the admiration of other nations, who, at first, inferior to them in those particulars, and instructing themselves from their acquirements, came afterwards to outstrip them very far in the same departments. Their contemptible vanity, which persuaded them that they had attained in every thing the summit of excellence, and their disdain to borrow from or imitate the practices of other nations, sufficiently account for the small degree of improvement in those arts and sciences of which they were the inventors, and for their never advancing beyond the point of mediocrity. The character of their mind was feeble; they had no emulation, no ardor of enterprise, no ambition of extending their dominion over nations whom they despised, or of holding inter-

course with them in the way of commerce. The hatred and contempt which they entertained for others was returned tenfold upon themselves, for there is no debt so certainly and so liberally repaid as contempt; and hence we may reasonably suspect exaggeration in the picture which the ancient writers have drawn of their manners and morals. Under the influence of this caution, I have endeavored to describe them with impartiality, and believe I have assigned them as much merit as they truly deserve. I shall remark, in its proper place, the strong resemblance which, in many points, they bear to an Asiatic nation, known to Europeans only in modern times—I mean the Chinese.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE PHENICIANS—Alphabetic Writing—Sanchoniatho—Navigation—Tyre.

AMONG the ancient nations who first showed a considerable degree of civilization and advancement in the useful arts, the Phœnicians deserve particular notice. It seems to rest on as good authority as can be brought for the origin of any of the useful arts, that it is to this eastern people that the world is indebted for the invention of writing, and for the first attempts at commercial navigation. I do not think the hypothetical reasoning of M. de Voltaire has much weight when he argues that this people, being the earliest nation which practised commerce, must have first found the expediency of using certain arbitrary characters for the purpose of carrying on their traffic, and keeping regular accounts. The Mexicans and Peruvians were acquainted with navigation, and practised commerce, and were, in other respects, highly polished and refined; yet they knew nothing of writing. The fact of the Phœnicians having very early attained to the use of writing seems to rest on better evidence than hypothetical reasoning. It seems to be agreed among the best informed writers, that the fragments of Sanchoniatho, though their antiquity has been vaunted by Porphyry and Philo considerably beyond the truth, are yet to be regarded as the composition of the earliest of the profane writers, and of a much more ancient date than any works of a Greek author. Sanchoniatho is generally supposed to have been contemporary with Joshua, who died 1443 years before the birth of Christ,

and about 500 years before the cities of Attica were united under Theseus. What remains of the works of this author are some fragments preserved by Eusebius, which were translated from the Phœnician language into Greek by Philo of Byblos. They give an account of the genealogy of the Phœnician gods; of Cœlus and of Saturn, and other deities afterwards adopted by the Greeks; and of the cosmogony or origin of the world;—accounts which Sanchoniatho says he collected from the most ancient historical monuments. The authenticity of these fragments has been questioned, and they have been supposed to have been forged by Porphyry from enmity to the Christian religion, and a desire to show that the pagans could boast of writings of equal antiquity with the Books of Moses. But it has been well observed, in answer to this supposition, that if Porphyry, or any other person, had made the forgery for such a purpose, they would not have fabricated a mass of nonsense and absurdity, which would throw ridicule and disgrace on any system it was meant to support. Holding those fragments, therefore, as authentic, they prove that alphabetic writing was in use among the Phœnicians many ages before the Greeks had the smallest acquaintance with it.*

To the Phœnicians, all antiquity has joined in attributing the invention of navigation; or, at least, it seems an agreed point that they were the earliest among the nations of antiquity who made voyages for the sake of commerce. The Canaanites (for it is by that name that the Phœnicians are known in Scripture) were a powerful people in the days of Abraham. Their situation, occupying a narrow country on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and confined on all quarters towards the land by the surrounding tribes, naturally induced them to turn their attention to navigation. In the days of Abraham, we learn with some certainty that they had sailed to the coast of Greece; for Inachus, whose daughter Io they carried off from that country, is generally supposed contemporary with Abraham. When we come down to the time of the Hebrew Judges, we find the Phœnicians so far advanced as a commercial people as to be able to send colonies to distant quarters, and to form settlements for trade both on the European and Asiatic coasts. Among their first settlements were those of Cyprus and Rhodes. They then passed into Greece, into Sicily, and Sardinia, and thence into the southern parts of Spain. They did not confine their voyages to the Mediterranean Sea, but, passing the straits, established themselves in the Isle of Gades, and built a settlement anciently named Gadir, now Cadiz. Stretching southwards from the straits, they formed settlements

* See Goguet's elaborate Dissertation on the Origin of Alphabetic Writing, "Orig. des Loix," t. i. l. ii. c. vi.; and a Dissertation on Sanchoniatho, by the same author, annexed to the first volume of the same work.