

HYMN TO THE NILE.

 TRANSLATED BY

REV. F. C. COOK,

 Canon of Exeter, Preacher of Lincoln's Inn, Chaplain in Ordinary
to the Queen.

THIS Hymn is important as bearing witness to the state of religious thought in Egypt in the time of Merneptah, the son of Rameses II, XIXth dynasty, according to the generality of Egyptologers, contemporary with Moses.¹ It is extant in two papyri, *Sallier* ii. p. 11, *Select Papyri*, pl. xx.-xxiii., and *Anastasi* vii. *Select Papyri*, pl. cxxxiv.-cxxxix., published by the Trustees of the British Museum.

The name of the author Enna is well known. He wrote the *Romance of the Two Brothers*, and other works preserved in the *Select Papyri*, and partially

¹ See, however, my Essay on Egyptian history in the first volume of the *Commentary on the Bible*.

translated by Mr. Goodwin, in *Cambridge Essays*, 1858, p. 257, and M. G. Maspero, *Genre épistolaire chez les anciens Égyptiens*. Paris, 1872.

A translation of this hymn was published by Maspero, *Hymne au Nil*, in 1868, with an introduction and critical notes of great value.

The attention of the reader is specially called to the metrical structure of this poem. The stanzas, containing upon an average ten couplets, are distinctly marked in the original, the first word in each being written in red letters ; hence the origin of rubricated MSS. Each clause also has a red point at the close. The resemblance with the earliest Hebrew poems has been pointed out by the translator in the *Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, and in the *Notes on Exodus*, in the *Speaker's Commentary on the Bible*.



HYMN TO THE NILE.

I. STROPHE.

Adoration of the Nile.

- 1 HAIL to thee O Nile !
 2 Thou shewest thyself in this land,
 3 Coming in peace, giving life to Egypt :
 4 O AMMON, (thou) leadest night unto day,¹
 5 A leading that rejoices the heart !
 6 Overflowing the gardens created by RA.²
 7 Giving life to all animals ;
 8 Watering the land without ceasing :
 9 The way of heaven descending :³
 10 Lover of *food*, bestower of corn,
 11 Giving light to every home, O PTAH !

¹ If this rendering is correct, the meaning must be that the god of the Nile is the secret source of light, see section 3, line 5, and section 8, line 1. The attributes of Egyptian gods, who represent the unknown under various aspects, are interchangeable to a great extent; here the Nile is Ammon, doing also the work of Ra. Dr. Birch suggests that the rendering may be, "hiding his course night and day."

² Ra, the sun-god, who is represented as delighting in flowers, see *Ritual*, c. LXXXI, "I am the pure lily which comes out of the fields of Ra."

³ The Nile-god traverses heaven; his course there corresponds to that of the river on earth.

II.

- 1 Lord of fishes, when the inundation returns
- 2 No fowls fall on the cultures.¹
- 3 Maker of spelt; creator of wheat:
- 4 who maintaineth the temples!
- 5 Idle hands he loathes²
- 6 For myriads, for all the wretched.
- 7 If the gods in heaven are grieved,³
- 8 Then sorrow cometh on men.

III.

- 1 He maketh the whole land open to the oxen,⁴
- 2 And the great and the small are rejoicing;
- 3 The response of men at his coming!⁵
- 4 His likeness is NUM!⁶
- 5 He shineth, then the land exulteth!
- 6 All bellies are in joy!
- 7 Every creature receives nourishment!
- 8 All teeth get food.

IV.

- 1 Bringer of food! Great Lord of provisions!
- 2 Creator of all good things!

¹ See x. 6. This is obscure, but it may mean that the Nile-god protects the newly sown fields from the birds.

² *I.e.*, he sets them at work. Thus *Ritual*, c. xv. 20, "Ra, the giver of food, destroys all place for idleness, cuts off all excuse."

³ As they are by idleness; see *Ritual*, cxxv, p. cclv, Birch.

⁴ *I.e.*, he makes it ready for cultivation.

⁵ Their joy and gratitude respond to his advance.

⁶ Num is the Nile-god regarded as giving life.

- 3 Lord of terrors ¹ and of choicest joys !
- 4 All are combined in him.
- 5 He produceth grass for the oxen ;
- 6 Providing victims for every god.
- 7 The choice incense is that which he supplies.
- 8 Lord in both regions,
- 9 He filleth the granaries, enricheth the storehouses,
- 10 He careth for the state of the poor.

V.

- 1 He causeth growth to fulfil all desires,
- 2 He never wearies of it.
- 3 He maketh his might a buckler.²
- 4 He is not graven in marble,³
- 5 As an image bearing the double crown.
- 6 He is not beheld :
- 7 He hath neither ministrants nor offerings :
- 8 He is not adored in sanctuaries :
- 9 His abode is not known :
- 10 No shrine is found with painted figures. ⁴

¹ The Egyptian word corresponds to *Αραφης*, which according to Plutarch, signifies τὸ ἀνδρείον. *Isis et Osiris*, c. 37. The Egyptians, like all ancient people, identify terror with strength or greatness.

² This scriptural phrase comes in abruptly. It is probably drawn from some older source.

³ The True Deity is not represented by any image. This is a relic of primeval monotheism: out of place as referring to the Nile, but pointing to a deeper and sounder faith. Compare the laws of Manu, i. 5-7.

⁴ See last line of section 13. There are no shrines covered, as usual, with coloured hieroglyphics. The whole of this passage is of extreme importance, showing that, apart from all objects of idolatrous worship, the old Egyptian recognised the existence of a Supreme God, unknown and inconceivable; the true source of all power and goodness. Compare the oldest forms of the 17th chapter of the funeral Ritual in Lepsius *Aelteste Texte*.

VI.

- 1 There is no building that can contain him !¹
- 2 There is no counsellor² in thy heart !
- 3 Thy youth delight in thee, thy children :
- 4 Thou directest³ them as King.
- 5 Thy law is established in the whole land,
- 6 In the presence of thy servants in the North :⁴
- 7 Every eye is satisfied with him :⁵
- 8 He careth for the abundance of his blessings.

VII.

- 1 The inundation comes, (then) cometh rejoicing ;
- 2 Every heart exulteth :
- 3 The tooth of the crocodiles, the children of NEITH⁶
- 4 (Even) the circle of the gods who are counted with thee.
- 5 Doth not its outburst water the fields,
- 6 Overcoming mortals (with joy) :
- 7 Watering one to produce another.⁷
- 8 There is none who worketh with him ;
- 9 He produces food without the aid of NEITH.⁸
- 10 Mortals he causes to rejoice.

¹ 1 Ki. viii. 27.

² Is. xi. 13, 14.

³ Or "thou givest them counsels, orderest all their goings."

⁴ *I.e.* "all magistrates are the servants of the deity, and administer his law from South to North."

⁵ Maspero "par lui est bue l'eau (les pleurs) de tous les yeux," *i.e.* "he wipes away tears from all eyes."

⁶ Dr. Birch, to whom I am indebted for this rendering, observes that the goddess Neith is often represented with two crocodiles sucking her breasts.

⁷ *I.e.* "The Nile fills all mortals with the languor of desire, and gives fecundity."

⁸ *I.e.* "without needing rain, the gift of the goddess of heaven." Such seems to be the meaning of a very obscure passage.

VIII.

- 1 He giveth light on his coming from darkness :¹
 2 In the pastures of his cattle
 3 His might produceth all :
 4 What was not, his moisture bringeth to life.
 5 Men are clothed to fill his gardens :
 6 He careth for his labourers.
 7 He maketh even and noontide,
 8 He is the infinite PTAH and KABES.²
 9 He createth all works therein,
 10 All writings, all sacred words,
 11 All his implements in the North.³

IX.

- 1 He enters with words the interior of his house,⁴
 2 When he willetth he goeth forth from his mystic fane.
 3 Thy wrath is destruction of fishes.⁵
 4 Then⁶ men implore thee for the waters of the season.
 5 "That the Thebaid may be seen like the Delta.
 6 That every man be seen bearing his tools,
 7 No man left behind his comrade !
 8 Let the clothed be unclothed,

¹ See note on section I.

² The meaning is, evidently, that he combines the attributes of Ptah the Demiurge, and Kabes, an unknown god.

³ All things serviceable to man, arms, implements, etc.

⁴ This seems to mean, he gives oracles at his shrine. Observe the inconsistency of this with section 5.

⁵ Causing scarcity of food in the land. See Ex. viii. 18, 21.

⁶ In a season of scarcity prayers are offered for supply of water. The following lines seem to describe great haste when the inundation comes on; none wait for their clothing, even when valuable, and the nightly solemnities are broken up: but the passage is obscure.

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