

THE HISTORY OF EGYPT

UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN letters first rose in Greece and Rome, the writers found a rich harvest of fable and tradition, out of which they wove those beautiful tales that we now read as the beginning of Greek and Roman history. The Egyptians were not favoured with historians who could thus fix and hand down to us their traditions; but, on the other hand, they had from far earlier times carved the names and deeds of their kings on the granite temples, and thus, instead of a rich poetic fable, they have left us a bald reality.

In each case, the history of the country begins with scattered and dark hints, which some minds seize upon as treasures and others overlook as worthless, but which the historian can neither safely lean upon nor yet wholly fling from him; and this is the case with the history of Egypt before the time when Abraham drove his herds into that country in search of food, which the drought had made scarce in Canaan.

Egypt was then broken up into several little kingdoms. Upper Egypt, the most powerful of these, had been ruled over by a race of kings who reigned in This, a city near the spot, or perhaps on the spot, where Abydos afterwards stood; and who had held Thebes, and

Manetho.

Manetho. some of them Memphis, as part of their kingdom. We are told the names of seventeen who reigned in This ; after which that city fell, and Thebes rose to be capital of Upper Egypt ; and it was perhaps in the reign of the second or third Theban king that Abraham entered the Delta.

The city of Elephantine, on an island in the Nile, just below the cataract at the southern boundary of Egypt, was also the capital of a little kingdom ; and we know the names, and nothing but the names, of nine kings who had reigned there. Elephantine no doubt fell when Thebes rose over the city of This.

Memphis was the capital of the rich corn-fields of Lower Egypt, or the land of Mizraim as it is called in the Old Testament ; and perhaps the tenth of those Memphite kings whose names are known to us was reigning in the time of Abraham.

We likewise have the name of one king who reigned at Heracleopolis ; and, as that city is close to Memphis, it is most likely that he ruled over Memphis, and made Heracleopolis the capital of Lower Egypt during his reign.

The people of both Upper and Lower Egypt seem to have been Copts, children of Cham or Ham, and from him they called their country Chemi ; and they spoke a language which, after it has undergone the changes of so many ages, we even now know as Coptic. Their religion was the same as what Herodotus and Diodorus afterwards found there : many cities had already their sacred animals ; the bull Apis in Memphis, the bull Mnevis in Heliopolis, and the goat Mando in Mendes, were fed and waited upon at the cost of those cities, and worshipped as images of Chem, or Amun-Ra, the Sun.

Their buildings were much the same as those which afterwards rose in such massive grandeur. Venephres, king of This, had al-

ABRAHAM.

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ready built pyramids at a city named Cochoe ; the older part of the great temple of Thebes, now called the temple of Karnak, was already begun ; and Abraham most likely saw the obelisk of Osirtesen I., which even yet stands at Heliopolis.

Wilkinson's
Thebes.

The carved writing, by means of figures of men and animals, which was afterwards, when easier ways of writing came into use, called sacred carving, or hieroglyphics, was even then not new. The inscriptions of the Osirtesens do not show us hieroglyphics in their earliest form ; in them we see many words spelt alphabetically mixt up with the symbols or pictures of objects and actions. There had been, most likely, many ages before their time during which the hieroglyphics were wholly symbolic, before alphabetic spelling had been thought of.

Egypt. Inscrip.
plate 6.

The journey of Abraham into Egypt was not that of a single family ; there was at the same time a great migration going on, of Phenicians, moving out of their own country into Lower Egypt, and along the African coast of the Mediterranean. We shall hereafter see that the Greek settlers at Cyrene had to drive them back from the coast, and tradition says that Phenician Dido was kindly received by them at Carthage. They were peaceably driven out of Canaan by other troops of herdsmen who were moving westward from Chaldæa and Mesopotamia, and who made the pasture-land too crowded for their loose and scattered way of life.

Manetho.

Pausanias,
lib. i. 7.

Gen. xi.

Abraham found Lower Egypt a well-tilled corn country ; the king, or Pharaoh, was surrounded by princes and servants, and was by no means looked upon by Abraham as his equal, as the little kings of Canaan had been.

Gen. xii.

Abraham did not remain long in Lower Egypt ; from the head of the Red Sea he went southward, and returned home by Mount Sinai and Petra ; but the Phenicians settled in crowds in the Delta,

