The History of Early Education. II. The Ancient Egyptians

Author(s): S. S. Laurie

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the gentlemen's schools, but in America upon the well-being of the common schools. Take the deliverances of Monsieur Renan for instance. It was not the German elementary school teacher that won at Sadowa, exclaims he, but German science; and after a little he goes on to say that the United States in creating a great system of popular education without supplying a balance wheel in the shape of a "serious higher instruction" shall be punished for a long time in a purgatory of intellectual mediocrity, vulgarity of manners, superficiality, and a general lack of intelligence.*

The American common school has very little to learn from the people's school of Europe. Perhaps the paternal gentleness, so near akin to pity, which dominates the methods of the directing powers, at least, when dealing with the children of the peasantry may be tolerable to an American if it can be cleared from the suspicion of being cant. But in secondary education and in higher education we have much to learn and have learned all we know from Europe, and following the decision of the generals at the close of the second day at Gettysburg, all that remains is to "correct the lines and fight it out."

Wellford Addis.

Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C.

THE HISTORY OF EARLY EDUCATION.

II. The Ancient Egyptians.

By far the most interesting of the ancient races were the Epyptians, whether we regard the antiquity, or the detailed organization, of their complex civilization.†

* Questions contemporaines (troisième édition), p. vii and p. 76.

† Authorities.—Herodotus, Rawlinson, Ebers, Diodorus Siculus; M. Maspero in the Dict. Pæd.; also his Ancient Egypt and Assyria; Schmidt's History of Education, (by way of reference); Le Page Renouf, Wilkinson's Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, Ranke's History of the World, Mariette's Outlines. Of course I give my own conclusions. As a rule, in the first part, I take Rawlinson, as the basis, and what I say is occasionally quoted and often abridged from him; but I make such modifications in his account as are suggested to me by the study of the other books mentioned.

A single stream, issuing from the equatorial regions, penetrates the African desert of interminable scorching sand, brings its waters safely through 2,000 miles of arid, thirsty plain, and then mingles them with the waves of the Mediterranean. This river has produced Egypt. The life-giving stream on its way through the desert spreads verdure and fertility along its course on either bank, and a strip of most productive territory is thus created, suited to attract the attention of men, and to become the home of a powerful nation. Egypt proper is the land to which this river gave birth.*

Politically, Egypt was a strict monarchy. Ranke holds that this was inevitable. One river and one inundation made Egypt. The necessity for a central administration to watch and regulate the waters and to settle questions of boundary when they retired is manifest. The monarch was thus source of all law and government, and as the center of the unity of the life of the nation in a material as well as a moral sense, he was likened to God and called the Son of God; and not only so, but he was believed to be the Son of God (the God *Ra*).

Intellectually, the Egyptians must take rank among the foremost nations of remote antiquity, but cannot for a moment compare with the great European races, whose rise was later,—the Greeks and Romans. Their minds possessed much subtlety and acuteness; they were fond of literary composition, and made great advances in many of the arts and sciences; they were in every department of life intelligent and ingenious. It is astonishing what an extensive literature they possessed at a very early date—books on religion, on morals, law, rhetoric, arithmetic, mensuration, geometry, medicine, books of travels, and, above all, novels! But the merit of the works is slight. The novels, we are informed by Egyptologists, are vapid, the medical treatises interlarded with charms and exorcisms, the travels devoid of interest, the general style of all the books forced and stilted. Egypt may in some particulars have stimulated, if not Greek thought, at least the sculptural and decorative art of Greece, giving it a basis to start from; but, otherwise, it cannot be said that the world owes much of its purely intellectual progress to this people, about whose literary productions there is always something that is weak and childish. Philosophic speculation, however, seems to have re-

* We must look to the north-east rather than to Ethiopia as the cradle of the Egyptian nation.

ceived a contribution from the esoteric doctrine of the priesthood. In Art, the power which the Egyptians exhibited was, however, greater than in thought; but the very highest qualities of Art were wanting. And yet, in one department, it was art of a high order; for the architecture produces its effect not only by its mass, according to Fergusson, but also by its harmony of proportion. The skill exhibited in overcoming difficulties in building is also marvellous. Indeed, we may say that in building, sculpture, and color decoration, generally, we find in Egypt the "dawn of artistic development for the whole human race." —(Ranke.)

Of all the religious works, the most important was the one which is commonly called "The Funeral Ritual," sometimes "The Book of the Dead;" but of which the Egyptian title was "The Manifestation to Light," or in other words, the book revealing light to the soul.* The Egyptians were profoundly religious. What most struck Herodotus, when, in the middle of the fifth century before our era, he visited the country, was the extreme devotion of its inhabitants. "The Egyptians," he says, "are religious to excess, far beyond any other race of men;" and, accordingly, the greater portion of his description of Egypt is occupied with an account of the priests, the temples, and the religious ceremonies. In the architectural remains, we see that the temple dominates over the palace, and is itself dominated by the tomb, both the temple and the tomb being the expression of religious ideas. Everywhere in Egypt gigantic structures upreared themselves into the air, enriched with all that Egyptian art could supply of painted and sculptured decoration, dedicated to the honor, and bearing the sacred name, of some divinity. The great temple of each city was the center of its life. A perpetual ceremonial of the richest kind went on within its walls; along its shady corridors, or through its sunlit courts, long processions made their way up or down its avenues of sphinxes. The calendar was crowded with festivals, and a week rarely passed without the performance of some special ceremony, possessing its own peculiar attractions.†

*The translation of the title is differently given by different scholars.

†NOTE.—The above is, I think, a quotation; and I wish it to be distinctly understood that this and subsequent lectures have been undergoing alteration for the last fifteen years, and that I cannot now always say when the language is my own and when it is another's, but I believe it is always my own except where quotation marks are inserted. It does not much matter.

It would appear that the Egyptian religion, like most other religions in the ancient world, had two phases or aspects; one, that in which it was presented to the general public, the vast mass of the population; the other, that which it bore in the minds of the intelligent, the learned, the initiated. To the former it was a polytheism of a multitudinous and in many respects of a gross character; to the latter it was a system combining monotheism with a metaphysical speculative philosophy on the two great subjects of the nature of God and the destiny of Man.

Mons. Le Page Renouf has given an exhaustive account of the religion in his Hibbert lectures; but for its fundamental conception, I am disposed to accept the view of Ebers, which moreover is borne out by many of the quotations from hymns and prayers given by Le Page Renouf himself. That view I understand to be that the Egyptian religion is in its earliest and best expression a monotheism. Osiris is the source, the One, and Isis is the Manifestation—Nature. The tendency of such a system to identify the One and Nature so as to pass into Pantheism is manifest. But in all his worship, the intelligent Egyptian seems to me to have seen, or at least been dimly conscious of, the spirit in the animal and material form. I say intelligent, for the broad fact that the mass honestly worshipped animals and reposed confidence in charms and a kind of magic is not to be denied. "Who does not know," says Juvenal (XV, 1.) "what kinds of monsters demented Egypt worships?" From a very early date the symbolism of divine power as manifested in nature was an animal symbolism; and, in the course of time, nothing but the symbolism, with a dubious sense of a spirit-power behind it, remained for the great mass of the population; but this vague sense was there and its existence can alone justify Ranke's view that there was nothing "secular" to the ancient Egyptian; "properly speaking there was nothing profane in the land."

The great motive ethical force in their religion was their belief in immortality and the great and godlike life which a good life on earth secured. The human spirit returned to God but yet retained its individuality. In connection with this doctrine, their ethical ideal was high. That it actuated the individual life of the citizen always and at all times or was even understood by the mass, it is absurd to suppose. Still, it constituted the ethical system of life *for the race*; and Christian ethics could teach the

cultured Egyptian little, except perhaps the doctrine of self-sacrifice. It is generally understood, however, that the morality was as lax in practice as it was elevated in theory. But what, in this connection, shall we say of Christianity itself these 2,000 years?

The classes were so separated one from another that it was long believed that the Caste system prevailed, as among the Hindus. It was not so, however; there was no rigid and compulsory system of division. In a general way, it would seem to be right to adopt the classification of Strabo, and to say that the entire free population of Egypt which did not belong to the sacerdotal or the military order, formed a sort of third estate, which admitted of sub-divisions, but is properly to be regarded as politically a single body. The soldiers and the priests were privileged; the rest of the community was without privilege of any kind; but the recognized customs and rights of the class to which each citizen belonged protected them. Of all the classes, that of the priests was the most powerful, and the most carefully organized. Priests often held important political offices; they served in the army also, and received rich gifts for good conduct; many of them accumulated great wealth through these secular employments, and their residences were of a kind not compatible with very simple habits.

Besides agriculture and the trades and handicrafts in which so many of the Egyptians found occupation for their time and talents, a considerable portion of the population pursued employments of a more elevated and intellectual character. Sculpture, painting, and music had their respective votaries, and engaged the services of a large number of artists. If dancing is to be viewed as a "fine art," we may add to these the paid dancers, who were numerous, but were not held in very high estimation. There were also employments analogous to our "professions," as those of the architect, the physician, and the scribe. The great mass of the people, however, were, there can be no doubt, in a state of abject poverty, and in a condition of practical slavery to those in authority, according to our modern notions at least. Of learned professions in Egypt outside the priesthood, the most important was that of the Scribe. Though writing (at least the cursive or demotic) was an ordinary accomplishment of the educated classes, and scribes were not therefore so absolutely neces-

sary as they are or have been in most Eastern countries for ordinary correspondence, yet there were still a large number of occupations for which professional penmanship was a pre-requisite, and others that demanded the kind of learning and skill in forms of transfer and business generally, and in the due recording of ceremonials and contracts, which a scribe naturally acquired in the training to his craft. Moreover, a scribe would often profess not only the demotic cursive script, but also the hieratic or hieroglyphic, and then his prospects of promotion were considerable. The Egyptian religion necessitated the multiplication of copies of the "Ritual of the Dead," and the employment of numerous clerks in the registration of the sacred treasures and the management of the sacred estates. The civil administration also depended largely upon a system of registration and of official reports which were perpetually being made to the court by the superintendents in all departments of the public service. Most private persons of large means kept bailiffs or secretaries who made up their accounts, paid their laborers, and otherwise acted as managers of their property. In commerce of all kinds also scribes were indispensable. There was thus a large number of lucrative posts which could be properly filled only by persons who were ready with the pen, familiar with the different kinds of writing, and good at figures. The occupation of scribe was regarded as one befitting men from the middle ranks of society, who might otherwise have been blacksmiths, carpenters, small farmers, or the like. If scribes failed to obtain government appointments, they might still hope to have their services engaged by the rich corporations which had the management of the Temples, or by private individuals of good means, or in business houses. Hence the scribe readily persuaded himself that his occupation was the first and best of all human employments.

The great number of persons who practiced medicine in Egypt is mentioned by Herodotus, who further notices the remarkable fact that, besides general practitioners, there were many who devoted themselves to special branches of medical science, some being oculists, some dentists, some skilled in treating diseases of the brain, some those of the intestines, and so on. According to a modern authority, the physicians constituted a special sub-division of the sacerdotal order; but this statement is open to question, though no doubt some of the priests were required to study medicine, and many did so of their own accord.

The profession of architect in some respects took precedence over any other. The chief court architect was a functionary of the highest importance, ranking among the most exalted officials. Considering the character of the duties entrusted to him, this was only natural, since the Kings generally set more store upon their buildings than upon any other matter, and since religion and architecture were closely associated. "At the time when the construction of the pyramids and other tombs," says Brugsch, "demanded artists of the first order, we find the place of architect entrusted to the highest dignitaries of the court of the Pharaohs. The royal architects recruited their ranks not unfrequently from the class of princes; and the inscriptions engraved upon the walls of their tombs inform us that, almost without exception, they married either the daughters or the grand-daughters of the reigning sovereigns, who did not refuse the architect this honor." Schools of architects had to be formed in order to secure a succession of competent persons, and the chief architect of the King was only the most successful out of many aspirants, who were educationally and socially upon a par. Practical builders of course constituted a lower class.

The relations of the sexes were decidedly on a better footing in Egypt than at Athens or most other Greek towns. Not only was polygamy unknown to the inhabitants of the Nile Valley (even licensed concubinage being permitted only to the Kings), but woman even took her proper rank as the friend and companion of man. She was never secluded in a harem, but constantly made her appearance alike in private company and in the ceremonies of religion, possessed equal rights with man in the eye of the law, shared equally with her brothers in her father's estate, was attached to temples in a quasi-sacerdotal character, and might even ascend the throne and administer the government.

The preceding synopsis of Egyptian life shows that we had in this Nile Valley a highly civilized nation, the people of which led peaceful, ordered and industrious lives, though a large proportion of them were abject and oppressed. And when we reflect that Egypt existed as an organized community under monarchs from 5000 years before Christ, we must admit that we are here in the presence of the oldest human civilization.

"With the fourth dynasty 4235 B. C., Egypt emerges from the

obscurity with which it has hitherto been surrounded and we are enabled to date facts by the help of the monuments. Chief among the kings of this period is the Cheops of Herodotus, the Khufu of cotemporary texts. He seems to have been a warrior king . . but more than a soldier, he was a builder, and one of the most remarkable of the Egyptian pyramids is his own tomb. One hundred thousand men, who were relieved every three months, are said to have been employed for thirty years upon this gigantic undertaking. It would assuredly tax our modern ingenuity to be obliged to construct a like monument; but a far more difficult problem would be the erection within it of chambers and corridors which, notwithstanding the superincumbent weight of thousands of tons, should last perfectly unmoved for sixty centuries. The fourth dynasty marks a culminating point in the history of the kingdom. By an extraordinary movement forward, Egypt threw off all trammels and emerged in the full glory of a fully developed civilization. From this moment class distinctions were recognized in Egyptian society, and art attained a breadth and dignity that even in later and more brilliant days were hardly surpassed."—Mariette's Outlines, translated by Miss Brodrick.

Even Chinese civilization is modern as compared with the Egyptian. Here we see what a nation, practically excluded from alien influences, could accomplish for its own growth in political life, in justice, and in the arts and sciences. It was overrun, rather than conquered, by the Hyksos, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The country went on in its way very little influenced by foreign interference with its native dynasties.

The strongly defined classes of the population have to be kept in view in considering the education of the Egyptians. There is no evidence that any state system of schools existed as we understand it in these days; nor can we discern any self-conscious ideal of human life up to which all free citizens should be educated. Speaking generally, we may say that apart from the general influences of the political, legal, and religious system and of social tradition, the education was determined wholly by social needs and was thus essentially technical and professional. The idea of a liberal education had not yet arisen. Indeed the

idea of culture, which is the term commonly used to denote a liberal education, we owe first to the Athenian Greeks.

1. *For the Priests*, who possessed all the learning of the time, there were important training schools at Thebes, Memphis, and Heliopolis. The pupils were divided into Exoterics—those not yet admitted into the inmost truths of the Egyptian religion, and Esoterics—those who had passed their novitiate and who themselves from the first belonged to the priestly caste. The course of instruction included language, mathematics, astronomy, natural science, music, and religion.

Clement of Alexandria partially enumerates the books which had to be studied by the Egyptian priesthood. The theology was very extensive. The priest who aimed at a right to practice the healing art had to study, in addition, numerous works on medicine.

The members of the royal family were allowed to associate only with priests' sons above 20 years of age and received a *portion* of the priestly education.

2. There were also schools, as I have already mentioned, for the profession of architect, and to these great importance was attached.

3. *For the military class* a regular course of instruction in gymnastic and music was provided. The music was of a primitive and stereotyped kind and had descended from remote antiquity. Plato in his Laws (II, 63, 7) praises this, because the music selected was of a kind not to soften the manners. It was largely composed of sacred chants.

4. *The industrial class* generally and a certain number of the laboring people learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. These subjects were, however, not commonly taught below the industrial class. "A little reading and writing are taught," says Diodorus Siculus (I, 81) "but not to all, but to those engaged with the industrial arts." Wherever any education was given beyond this, arithmetic and geometry always had a prominent place assigned to them. Writing, as we see from tablets in the British Museum, received much attention. And indeed when we consider the nature of the Egyptian script the art of reading and writing even the cursive hand in a very ordinary way must have been a rare accomplishment outside the priesthood, the professional scribe, and the governing classes. That the secular professional class were specifically called "scribes" seems

also to point to this as the truth. Such of the people as learned writing would learn only at most the cursive demotic hand, and not much of that.

5. *Children* generally were trained to the occupation of their parents and so received practical, or what is now termed technical, instruction from their earliest years.

But perhaps the most interesting fact in the education of Egypt was the institution of schools in all the large towns for the education of those who, leaving the mass of the laboring and industrial class, owing to their superior intelligence or greater ambition, aimed at the occupation or profession of scribe. There is no reason to doubt that these schools were open to all (I am not aware that they were gratuitous) and if this were so, it must be admitted that Egypt "provided an open career for talent such as scarcely existed elsewhere in the old world, and such as few modern communities can be said even yet to furnish. It was always possible under despotic governments that the capricious favor of a sovereign should raise to a high, or even to the highest position, the lowest person in the kingdom. But in Egypt alone of all ancient states does a system seem to have been established whereby persons of all rank, even the lowest, were invited to compete for the royal favor, and, by distinguishing themselves in the public schools, to establish a claim for employment in the public service. That employment once obtained, their future depended on themselves. Merit secured promotion; and it would seem that the efficient scribe had only to show himself superior to his fellows in order to rise to the highest position but one in the empire."—(Rawlinson.)

The teachers were for most part priests. I cannot recall any evidence that there were schools of Medicine; it is probable that, as in post-Christian times in Europe, physicians were trained by apprenticeship to individuals.

There is no doubt that, as compared with other nations, education was widely spread in ancient Egypt. Not only in all the larger towns were there numerous schools such as I have mentioned, but also in small villages they were generally to be found, though of a purely adventure and intermittent character.

The most important point to notice is that the occupation of scribe formed the connecting link between the lower classes and advancement to a higher class. Maspero (chap. I) says, "There

is no sacrifice which the smaller folk deem too great if it enables them to give their sons the acquirements which may raise them above the common people, or at least ensure a less miserable fate." A boy displaying some intelligence would be sent to the village school at six or seven, where some old pedagogue would teach him the rudiments of the three R's. If he did not find his way next to a provincial school, he would enter an office that he might become a "learned scribe." Occupied there in copying letters, circulars, and legal documents, his master supervising his work and correcting it while the boy re-writes it, he gradually acquires a competent acquaintance with writing and business and legal forms of all kinds. If he aims at a knowledge of the hieratic script he would have to copy from books which contained examples. Having gone through this apprenticeship, he applies for a better post. He marries, and his children become scribes like himself. "In certain administrations," says Maspero, "there are whole dynasties of scribes."

The difficulties of teaching must have been great and as we know, the discipline was severe. "The hawk is taught to fly and the pigeon to nest; I shall teach you your letters, you idle villain!" is the utterance of an irate Egyptian school-master. There was also a pedagogic saying, "A young fellow has a back; he hears when we strike it." A scholar writing to his master, after having left school, says that "his bones had been broken like those of an ass."*

The methods pursued we know little or nothing of. That dictation was largely resorted to we can rightly infer from the school copies in the British and French museums, as well as from the necessity of devoting a large portion of time to learning the Egyptian character. The copies were traced on wooden tablets or bits of stone, and the pupil imitated them with a style on wooden tablets covered with a layer of red or white stucco. The more advanced were promoted to write extracts from good authors, on papyrus, probably from dictation. The master corrected the exercises by putting the true forms on the margin wherever the pupil had made a mistake.

The schools seem to have been (but not always) held in temples or in parts of the temple buildings. The village schools were doubtless held in the house of the teacher—or perhaps in the open air under some cover.

* M. Maspero in Dict. Pæd.

It will be seen from the above that there was no effort made by state or church to raise the standard of intellectual life and culture. In so far as instruction went beyond the acquisition of reading and writing, it had a technical and practical purpose—except perhaps in the esoteric school of the Priests. What we call "liberal" education was not dreamt of even for the few. The idea of liberal education did not exist among the laity; on the other hand, the course of instruction for the priesthood comprehended the whole range of knowledge as then understood, and as this was pursued for its own sake, and in the interests of learning and of the human spirit, it may fairly be called liberal education.

We are compelled by a consideration of the above facts to conclude that the ancient Egyptians had an education as widespread and as effective, relatively to the then state of knowledge, as Europe had up to the earlier decades of this century. The masses of the people had, spite of the poverty and depressing character of their lives, the means of obtaining the elements of literature and were educated by this, the family and national tradition, and the festivals and ceremonials of their religious system. It cannot be said, however, that they were educated by their political constitution to anything but submission. Personal interest in civic and political life, and personal responsibility for the welfare of the State were things alien to the Egyptian as to the Oriental mind generally. It was left to Greece and Rome, and modern Europe, and America, to find in a community of political interests and responsibilities a potent element in the education of individual citizens.

S. S. Laurie, LL.D.

University of Edinburgh.