

# Exploration and Discovery.

## THE WESTCAR PAPYRUS.

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A telescope which could give a glimpse into the past would be indeed a prize. As yet lenses are made only for distance in space; unhappily our opticians do not supply them for distance in time. If this long-felt want were met, for which however we discern very little hope, it would correct many a historical notion now accepted as unquestioned truth. In the meanwhile, the best substitute is an old manuscript, when one can be secured. In the year 1886 the Berlin Museum acquired a papyrus, in a somewhat shattered condition, from a certain Miss Westcar, an English lady. This was published at Berlin in 1890, edited by Dr. A. Erman. It has a high value not in being what is generally termed a historical record, that is to say, a list of kings and their battles, but in giving a collection of tales affording a glimpse at the prevalent thinking of the period when it was written. The age of the papyrus is almost certainly that of Moses, or perhaps a little earlier, a profoundly interesting and important era in the world's history. It was the time of the birth of the great Hebrew nation. It evidently was one of the flowering periods of literature. Every age is important, but this must have been of especial importance as a time when the formative powers of much of the thought of the ages since were germinated. Poetry traces its descent from Pentaur, and legislation from Moses. Into a period like this any glimpse, however imperfect, awakens our curiosity. The Westcar Papyrus has been battered not a little in its more than thirty centuries of existence. But the portion which remains is fairly legible and not difficult to understand. It consists of two or three tales of wonder, such as Joseph might have told, or Moses might have heard related by Pharaoh's daughter. Strange to think of the little bright-eyed boy standing at the knee of the princess and eagerly listening to her story, filling his little mind with wonder, as he eagerly asked for another tale. More interesting to find out that human nature at the time of the Exodus was not so marvelously different from human nature today.

### I. UBBA-ANIR AND THE WAX CROCODILE.

The first story, that is to say the first in the portion of the MS. recovered, is in a very imperfect condition at the commencement. But from a word here and there on the broken leaves the sense may be gathered. It is a tale told to a prince, the son of King Chefu, about a marvelous circumstance which

happened during the reign of his father, King Nebka, defunct. On one occasion His Majesty went to the temple of Ptah and visited the house of the chief reader, Ubba-Anir. The wife of Ubba-Anir noticed a young man in the suite of the king. She sent a message to him to visit her. Ubba-Anir had a country villa on a lake. His wife directed that it was to be put in order, and made an assignation with the youth to meet her there, where "they eat, drank, bathed, and took pleasure." This came to the ears of Ubba-Anir, who became angry. He made a model of a crocodile in wax, and recited over it magic words. This he gave to his steward. Here the narrative becomes fairly perfect. "When the evening came the youth went to bathe as was his custom each day. The steward cast the crocodile of wax after him into the water, and it became a living crocodile seven cubits long, which seized the youth. Ubba-Anir was detained with His Majesty King Nebka seven days. The youth retained his breath. When the seventh day came King Nebka ordered the chief reader, Ubba-Anir, before him, who said 'Your Majesty would like to see a prodigy which has happened in the time of your Majesty.' (They went to the lake.) Ubba-Anir called the crocodile and said 'Bring up the youth.' His Majesty King Nebka was alarmed at the crocodile. Ubba-Anir bowed at this and seized the creature, which in his hand became a crocodile of wax. Then the chief reader told King Nebka what the youth had done with his wife. Thereupon His Majesty said to the crocodile 'Take what is thine and go down.' This the crocodile did and went to the bottom of the lake, and it is not known what became of him. Then King Nebka had the wife of Ubba-Anir seized and taken to the north boundary of the palace. There he gave her to the fire, and (her ashes) to the lake. Behold a prodigy which happened in the time of King Nebka, performed by the chief reader, Ubba-Anir. Then His Majesty King Chefu said, 'Now let there be offered to the defunct 1,000 loaves and 100 jugs of beer, one ox with two measures of incense to King Nebka. And with it let there be given one loaf and one jug of beer, a great piece of meat and a measure of incense to the chief reader, Ubba-Anir; I have evidence of his skill.' All was done as His Majesty commanded."

## REMARKS.

These tales carry us back to a period anterior to the Exodus of the Children of Israel, from three to four thousand years ago. They show human nature to be wonderfully the same then as now. We note the same interest in what is extraordinary and surprising, and further may learn that marvels were not of common occurrence, or the story-tellers would not have had to go back so far into antiquity to find them. For between the age of Chefu and that of the MS. as generally calculated there must have been 2,000 years. Were they traditions or inventions? In all probability the latter, for the lapse of time between their transaction and narration was very great. They suggest the same delight in fiction, where the good and great are rewarded and

the wicked punished. Had these people been educated like ourselves and been surrounded with the same circumstances they would not have been different from us.

The story reveals an unexpected view of the state of society in those days when we learn of that gentleman having a lake villa besides his ordinary dwelling. This is not the only one in Egyptian literature of the faithlessness of wives, which was regarded as a great wrong, calling for terrible vengeance. The narrative indicates a great freedom in the life of ladies in those days and hence a confidence in the propriety of their conduct. It shows a high moral tone in this respect. It is worth noting that where an undefined number is wanted seven is used. The reader was detained seven days, and the crocodile was seven cubits long. The foundation of the tale is a belief in magical powers to be gained from the study of magical books. The power *Ubba-Anir* possessed was not very dissimilar to that recorded of Egyptian magicians in the *Book of Exodus*. Rather noteworthy too is the amount of offering. The king is to have 1,000 loaves and 100 jugs of beer. The magician, who really should have the glory of the prodigy, only one of each. What became of all that food, and what was the idea of its service to the departed, opens up some curious questions. Possibly there was a notion that the corpse had a *Ka* (spirit), and the food had a *Ka*, and so in some way the gifts were helpful to the defunct. Anyhow the priests, as ever in religious fancies, gained emolument by the rite.

## II. ZAZAMANK AND THE LOST JEWEL.

"I have a tale to tell of a prodigy that happened at the time of thy father, Seneferoo, concerning the chief reader, Zazamank. One day King Seneferoo sent for the chief reader, Zazamank, and when he was brought His Majesty said to him, 'I have sent for you to the palace to seek for me how I can be happy (find a place of heart-refreshment). I cannot find out for myself.' Zazamank replied, 'Ah! go to the lake of Pharaoh. Have a barge fitted out with all the beautiful women of the court. Then the heart of Your Majesty will be refreshed in seeing their movements in the barge. Thou wilt see the beautiful prospect of thy lake. Thou wilt see beautiful fields and banks. Then thy heart will be refreshed. I will sit at the rudder. Get twenty oars of ebony tipped with gold; the fittings of precious wood with wrought brass. Let there be brought twenty beautiful women fair in shape and locks, that are virgins, attired with lace veils.' This was all done by order of His Majesty. They went in the boat and the heart of His Majesty was glad. Then a jewel (a fish of malachite) belonging to one of them was caught in a veil and fell into the water. The owner stopt rowing and her companions ceased rowing. His Majesty said 'Why do you not row?' They answered 'Our companion has ceased rowing.' Then His Majesty appealed to her and she said 'My jewel has fallen into the water.' Then His Majesty said to Zazamank 'My brother, I have done what you said and the heart of His Majesty was refreshed

by seeing these row. But the jewel of a little one has fallen into the water, and she has ceased to row.' The king promised to replace it, but the girl replied that it was a favorite jewel. Then the chief reader, Zazamank, recited an incantation. Thereupon there was lifted up all the water of the lake from one side to the other, and the jewel was found lying in a potsherd (or shell). Then he took it to his mistress. Now the water was twelve cubits deep and fourteen at the bend of the lake. Then he uttered the incantation and brought the waters of the lake to their proper place. Then His Majesty passed a happy day, and recompensed Zazamank with all good gifts. Behold the prodigy which happened in the time of thy father, King Seneferoo, performed by the chief reader, the Scribe Zazamank. His Majesty King Chefu commanded, 'Let there be given 1,000 loaves of bread, an 100 jugs of beer, an ox, two measures of incense to His Majesty King Seneferoo. And also let there be given a loaf of bread, a jug of beer, and a measure of incense to the chief reader, the Scribe Zazamank, for I have seen an evidence of his skill.' And it was done as His Majesty commanded."

## REMARKS.

Here again we see how human nature is about the same in all ages. The king, like great people of today, has his fits of ennui. He seeks the counsel of the chief reader, a religious officer. This indicates that there were scribes considered holy in those days, for the reading of which there were officers at the temples. The king is to find refreshment in a lake trip, to view the scenes of nature. Added to this there is something charming in the description of the royal barge, of which Zazamank takes care to have charge of the helm, to be rowed by twenty fair damsels with beautiful heads of hair and oars of ebony tipped with gold, whose rhythmic movements (for that is probably the meaning of the curious phrase, literally, seeing them go up and down), in their lace veils, must have been really very pretty. To be rowed in this fashion all day long on a sunlit stream would be interesting to most of us now-a-days. Five thousand years of evolution, or say half that period, has not destroyed the possibility of enjoyment of such a holiday. There is something very natural, too, in the young lady's pettish stop at the loss of the jewel. It is rather a pretty feature in the story that the magician used his power for such an act of gallantry as to restore to the girl the amulet she prized.

## III. THE THIRD STORY.

The third story is incomplete so far as it goes, and is inferior in interest. The broken lines suggest that it is a tale told by the son of the King Dadafor, in which he says that the former stories belonged to another age and were not proven, but there was a living magician who might be sent for. The man Dada by name was 110 years of age, and had for food 500 loaves and the leg of an ox, and for drink 100 jugs of beer each day. He knew how to replace a head when cut off, to chase a lion, and the secrets of Thot. He was sent

for by the king. When the messenger arrived he found Dada lying in his private apartment with one slave to feed him and another to rub his feet. An interesting instance of the antiquity of massage. He was brought to the king, who received him in state in the saloon of Pharaoh. The king proposed that a criminal should be sent for to be beheaded in the court, so as to give Dada an opportunity of showing his skill. The magician objected to having a human being thus treated. A goose was brought in, its head was cut off, the body and head laid on different sides of the hall. As Dada recited his incantations the two moved together; the head was replaced and the goose began to cackle. A similar experiment was tried on another bird and then on an ox. In each case after beheading the head was restored. Then came the question of the secrets of Thot. Those, however, could only be disclosed by the eldest of a triplet about to be born. There follows an account of the birth of the three children attended by a party of goddesses under the direction of Ra, and the narrative is broken off just when it seems impossible to guess what was about to happen. Unhappily it is vain to send to any library for the completion of the novel.