

AN EGYPTIAN ROMANCE.

It is Told in the Papyrus Recently Acquired by the Berlin Museum.

The National Zeitung gives the following interesting summary of the papyrus which the Berlin museum recently acquired from the heirs of Richard Lepsius, and the reading of which has only just been completed. This papyrus, which was written in the vulgar tongue, is not only of archeological importance but of much literary interest; being neither more nor less than a historical novel, though left in an unfinished state. The papyrus dates from the sixteenth century B. C., and from the eighteenth dynasty; but the story related in it goes back nearly a thousand years to the reign of King Cheops, the fabled builder of the pyramids.

When the story opens King Cheops is seated among his sons and listening to their tales of the miracles said to have been wrought at the court of his predecessors. Prince Chephren, who afterward built the second pyramid, related that a magician in the reign of King Nebka had made a waxen crocodile which, if placed in the chamber of a wife untrue to her husband, would seize her and her paramour and deliver them over to the husband. Another Prince related that King Sufro, the father of Cheops, feeling oppressed and not knowing how to "relieve his heart," took counsel of a wise man; who advised him to go to the banks of the lake near the palace and let all the maidens of the court row up and down the water. This was done, and the monarch's heart was relieved. But all of a sudden one of the maidens began to make lamentations, for she had dropped a jewel into the water, which was forty feet deep. A magician was sent for, and, reciting an incantation, he coaxed the jewel up from the bottom of the lake and returned it to the maiden.

King Cheops was so struck with wonder at these stories, that he ordered sacrifices to be offered to the manes of this sage and of the magicians; but Prince Hardadaf informed him that they were not all dead, and that one of them, named Dedi, dwelt in the city of Ded Sneiril. Prince Hardadaf described him as being a hundred years old, but as still able to eat daily five hundred rolls of bread and the quarter of an ox, and to drink a hundred flagons of beer. He was able to unite a head to the trunk from which it had been decapitated; to make lions follow him like dogs, and he also knew the place where would be found certain precious materials of the house of the god Thoth, which King Cheops was very anxious to have for building his pyramid. The King sent Prince Hardadaf to fetch the sage Dedi, whom he found stretched upon his bed. Dedi consented to accompany him into the King's presence; and, upon being asked by his majesty whether it was true that he could reunite a decapitated head to the trunk, replied in the affirmative; whereupon the King ordered a prisoner to be brought out for experiment. But the sage Dedi asked that an animal might be supplied him and not a man; whereupon a goose was brought. Its head was cut off and placed in the eastern corner of the chamber, with the body in the western corner, and Dedi then pronounced a form of words, immediately after which the body got up and walked, the head wriggling along the pavement until the two met and rejoined, the goose then waddling away. Dedi repeated the same miracle with a duck and a bull, and the King then questioned him as to the house of Thoth. Dedi said that the materials which the King wished for were in a house at Heliopolis; but that he had not the power to make them over to him; the only one who could do so being the eldest one of the three sons whom Red Dedt should bear. Red Dedt, he added, was the wife of the priest of the Sun at Sachebu; and she would bear three sons to a god, and these three sons would all be Kings, the eldest being also high priest of Heliopolis. When the King heard those words he was troubled.

There is a hiatus in the papyrus at this point; and, without being told what course King Cheops has determined upon, we arrive at the main incident of

the story—namely, the birth of the children of the Sun. When Red Dedt felt the first pangs of childbirth, the Sun sent for the goddesses Isis, Nephthys, Mesehent and Hekt, as well as the god Canum, and said to them: "Deliver Red Dedt of the three children, who will one day be Kings in this land; they will build you temples, they will feed your altars, they will make you many libations, and will enrich your sanctuaries." The gods and goddesses assumed the shape of mortal women, and went to the house of the priest and offered to deliver his wife. The priest accepted, and Red Dedt accordingly gave birth to three boys an ell long and with lusty arms. Mesehent predicted that they would all reign; and they were, in fact, the three first Kings of the fifth dynasty—Userkaf, Sahure, and Kakar. The priest, full of gratitude, gave corn to the supposed midwives, who then took their flight into empyrean. But when the divinities got near to the domain of the Sun, Isis said, "How is it that we have wrought no miracle for the children whom we have delivered from their mother's womb?" Thereupon, the goddesses stirred up a tempest, and, after having enchanted the corn, caused the wind to carry it into the priest's house. When Red Dedt, after two week's rest resumed the management of her household, the servant told her that the corn given to the midwives was still in the granary. Red Dedt sent her to fetch a little of it; but she returned in terror, saying that she heard in the granary the sounds of music and song "as when the birth of a King is being celebrated." This miracle was nearly fatal to the children; for, when Red Dedt upon one occasion punished her servant, the latter left the house in wrath and said to the neighbors: "How dares she to punish me, this woman who has given birth to three Kings! I will go and inform King Cheops."

Here the papyrus ends; so that no information is given as to what King Cheops did to get rid of these future pretenders, nor how they escaped his persecution; and this—as Herr Lepsius, in his prefatory notice, remarked—is all the more unfortunate because the papyrus evidently hands down a tradition of facts. Thus we may learn from it that Chephren was a son of Cheops; that the fifth dynasty originated in the town of Sachebu; that the three first Kings of it were brothers, and that the eldest was priest at Heliopolis before ascending to the throne. The papyrus in question is the oldest known document in the popular tongue.

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