

THE SONG OF THE HARPER.

TRANSLATED BY

LUDWIG STERN.

THE text of the following song, found in the tomb of Neferhetep at Abd-el-Gurnah, is a good specimen of Egyptian poetry of the XVIIIth Dynasty. It was first copied by Mr. Dümichen (*Historische Inschriften* II. 40,) and subsequently by myself. In addition to a translation in the *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 1873, p. 58, I gave some critical observations in the same journal of 1875. Professor Lauth of Munich translated it in an appendix to his essay on the music of the ancient Egyptians.

The song is very remarkable for the form of old Egyptian poetry, which like that of the Hebrews delights in a sublimer language, in parallelisms and antitheses, and in the ornament of a burden; no doubt it was sung, and it seems to be even rythmic, forming verses of equal length.

Ured urui pu mā
Pa shau nefer kheper
Khetu her sebt ter rek Rā
Famāu her at r ast-sen.

Though part of the text is unhappily much mutilated, we yet may gather the general ideas of the poem from the *disjecta membra* which remain.

It is a funeral song, supposed to be sung by the harper at a feast or anniversary in remembrance of the deceased patriarch Neferhetep, who is represented sitting with his sister and wife Rennu-m-ast-neh, his son Ptahmes and his daughter Ta-Khat standing by their side, whilst the harper before them is chanting. The poet addresses his speech as well to the dead as to the living, assuming in his fiction the former to be yet alive. The room of the tomb, on the walls of which such texts were inscribed, may be thought a kind of chapel appointed for the solemn rites to be performed by the survivors. The song which bears a great resemblance to the *Song of the House of King Antef*, lately translated by the eminent Mr. Goodwin, affords a striking coincidence with the words which *Herodotus* (II. 78)¹ asserts to have been repeated on such occasions, whilst a wooden image of the deceased, probably the figure called *usheb*, was circulating among the guests. "Look upon this!" they said, "then drink and rejoice, for thou shalt be as this is."

¹ See *Records of the Past*, Vol. IV., p. 117.



THE SONG OF THE HARPER.

[Chanted by the singer to the harp who is in the chapel of the Osirian, the Patriarch of Amen, the blessed Neferhotep.]

He says :

The great one is truly at rest,
the good charge is fulfilled.
Men pass away since the time of RA,¹
and the youths come in their stead.
Like as RA reappears every morning,
and TUM² sets in the horizon,
men are begetting,
and women are conceiving.
Every nostril inhaleteth once the breezes of dawn,
but all born of women go down to their places.

Make a good day, O holy father !
Let odours and oils stand before thy nostril.
Wreaths of lotus are on the arms and the bosom of thy
sister,
dwelling in thy heart, sitting beside thee.
Let song and music be before thy face,
and leave behind thee all evil cares !
Mind thee of joy, till cometh the day of pilgrimage,
when we draw near the land which loveth silence.
Not³ peace of heart³ his loving son.

Make a good day, O blessed NEFERHOTEP,
thou Patriarch perfect and pure of hands !
He finished his existence . . (the common fate of men).
Their abodes pass away,
and their place is not ;
they are as they had never been born
since the time of RA.
(They in the shades) are sitting on the bank of the river,
thy soul is among them, drinking its sacred water,

¹ The Sun.

² A form of the Sun god of the West, the chief god of Heliopolis.

³ Lacuna.

following thy heart, at peace¹
 Give bread to him whose field is barren,
 thy name will be glorious in posterity for evermore ;
 they will look upon thee¹
 (The Priest clad in the skin)² of a panther will pour to
 the ground,
 and bread will be given as offerings ;
 the singing women^x
 Their forms are standing before RA,
 their persons are protected¹
 RANNU³ will come at her hour,
 and SHU will calculate his day,
 thou shalt awake¹ (woe to the bad one !)
 He shall sit miserable in the heat of infernal fires.

Make a good day, O holy father,
 NEFERHOTEP, pure of hands !
 No works of buildings in Egypt could avail,
 his resting place is all his wealth¹
 Let me return to know what remaineth of him !
 Not the least moment could be added to his life,
 (when he went to) the realm of eternity.
 Those who have magazines full of bread to spend,
 even they shall encounter the hour of a last end.
 The moment of that day will diminish the valour of the
 rich¹

Mind thee of the day, when thou too shalt start for the land,
 to which one goeth to return not thence.
 Good for thee then will have been (an honest life,
 therefore be just and hate transgressions,
 for he who loveth justice (will be blessed).
 The coward and the bold, neither can fly, (the grave)
 the friendless and proud are alike
 Then let thy bounty give abundantly, as is fit,
 (love) truth, and ISIS shall bless the good,
 (and thou shalt attain a happy) old age.

¹ Lacuna.

² The panther's skin was the special characteristic of the dress of the priest of Khem the vivifier.

³ Rannu, an Egyptian goddess who presided over the harvest.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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