

SETNA AND THE MAGIC BOOK

The mighty King User.maat.ra (Ra-meses the Great) had a son named Setna Kha.em.uast who was a great scribe, and very learned in all the ancient writings. And he heard that the magic book of Thoth, by which a man may enchant heaven and earth, and know the language of all birds and beasts, was buried in the cemetery of Memphis. And he went to search for it with his brother An.he.hor.eru; and when they found the tomb of the king's son, Na.nefer.ka.ptah, son of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Mer.neb.ptah, Setna opened it and went in.

Now in the tomb was Na.nefer.ka.ptah, and with him was the _ka_ of his wife Ahura; for though she was buried at Koptos, her _ka_ dwelt at Memphis with her husband, whom she loved. And Setna saw them seated before their offerings, and the book lay between them. And Na.nefer.ka.ptah said to Setna, "Who are you that break into my tomb in this way?" He said, "I am Setna, son of the great King User.maat.ra, living for ever, and I come for that book which I see between you." And Na.nefer.ka.ptah said, "It cannot be given to you." Then said Setna, "But I will carry it away by force."

Then Ahura said to Setna, "Do not take this book; for it will bring trouble on you, as it has upon us. Listen to what we have suffered for it."

"We were the two children of the King Mer.neb.ptah, and he loved us very much, for he had no others; and Na.nefer.ka.ptah was in his palace as heir over all the land. And when we were grown, the king said to the queen, 'I will marry Na.nefer.ka.ptah to the daughter of a general, and Ahura to the son of another general.' And the queen said, 'No, he is the heir, let him marry his sister, like the heir of a king, none other is fit for him.' And the king said, 'That is not fair; they had better be married to the children of the general.'

"And the queen said, 'It is you who are not dealing rightly with me.' And the king answered, 'If I have no more than these two children, is it right that they should marry one

another? I will marry Na.nefer.ka.ptah to the daughter of an officer, and Ahura to the son of another officer. It has often been done so in our family.'

"And at a time when there was a great feast before the king, they came to fetch me to the feast. And I was very troubled, and did not behave as I used to do. And the king said to me, 'Ahura, have you sent some one to me about this sorry matter, saying, "Let me be married to my elder brother"? 'I said to him, 'Well, let me marry the son of an officer, and he marry the daughter of another officer, as it often happens so in our family.' I laughed, and the king laughed. And the king told the steward of the palace, 'Let them take Ahura to the house of Na.nefer.ka.ptah to-night, and all kinds of good things with her.' So they brought me as a wife to the house of Na.nefer.ka.ptah; and the king ordered them to give me presents of silver and gold, and things from the palace.

"And Na.nefer.ka.ptah passed a happy time with me, and received all the presents from the palace; and we loved one another. And when I expected a child, they told the king, and he was most heartily glad; and he sent me many things, and a present of the best silver and gold and linen. And when the time came, I bore this little child that is before you. And they gave him the name of Mer-ab, and registered him in the book of the 'House of life.'

"And when my brother Na.nefer.ka.ptah went to the cemetery of Memphis, he did nothing on earth but read the writings that are in the catacombs of the kings, and the tablets of the 'House of life,' and the inscriptions that are seen on the monuments, and he worked hard on the writings. And there was a priest there called Nesi-ptah; and as Na.nefer.ka.ptah went into a temple to pray, it happened that he went behind this priest, and was reading the inscriptions that were on the chapels of the gods. And the priest mocked him and laughed. So Na.nefer.ka.ptah said to him, 'Why are you laughing at me?' And he replied, 'I was not laughing at you, or if I happened to do so, it was at your reading writings that are worthless. If you wish so much to read writings, come to me, and I will bring you to the place where the book is which Thoth himself wrote with his own hand, and which will bring you to the gods. When you read but two pages in this you will enchant the heaven, the earth, the abyss, the mountains, and the sea; you shall know what the birds of the sky and the crawling things are saying; you shall see the fishes of the deep, for a divine power is there to bring them up out of the depth. And when you read the second page, if you are in the world of ghosts, you will become again in the shape you were in on earth. You will see the sun shining in the sky, with all the gods, and the full moon.'

"And Na.nefer.ka.ptah said, 'By the life of the king! Tell me of anything you want done and I'll do it for you, if you will only send me where this book is.' And the priest answered Na.nefer.ka.ptah, 'If you want to go to the place where the book is, you must give me a hundred pieces of silver for my funeral, and provide that they shall bury me as a rich priest.' So Na.nefer.ka.ptah called his lad and told him to give the priest a hundred pieces of silver; and he made them do as he wished, even everything that he asked for. Then the priest said to Na.nefer.ka.ptah, 'This book is in the middle of the river at Koptos, in an iron box; in the iron box is a bronze box; in the bronze box is a sycamore box; in the sycamore box is an ivory and ebony box; in the ivory and ebony box is a silver box; in the silver box is a golden box, and in that is the book. It is twisted all round with snakes and scorpions and all the other crawling things around the box in which the book is; and there is a deathless snake by the box.' And when the priest told Na.nefer.ka.ptah, he did not know where on earth he was, he was so much delighted.

"And when he came from the temple he told me all that had happened to him. And he said, 'I shall go to Koptos, for I must fetch this book; I will not stay any longer in the north.' And I said, 'Let me dissuade you, for you prepare sorrow and you will bring me into trouble in the Thebaid.' And I laid my hand on Na.nefer.ka.ptah, to keep him from going to Koptos, but he would not listen to me; and he went to the king, and told the king all that the priest had said. The king asked him, 'What is it that you want?' and he replied, 'Let them give me the royal boat with its belongings, for I will go to the south with Ahura and her little boy Mer-ab, and fetch this book without delay.' So they gave him the royal boat with its belongings, and we went with him to the haven, and sailed from there up to Koptos.

"Then the priests of Isis of Koptos, and the high priest of Isis, came down to us without waiting, to meet Na.nefer.ka.ptah, and their wives also came to me. We went into the temple of Isis and Harpokrates; and Na.nefer.ka.ptah brought an ox, a goose, and some wine, and made a burnt-offering and a drink-offering before Isis of Koptos and Harpokrates. They brought us to a very fine house, with all good things; and Na.nefer.ka.ptah spent four days there and feasted with the priests of Isis of Koptos, and the wives of the priests of Isis also made holiday with me.

"And the morning of the fifth day came; and Na.nefer.ka.ptah called a priest to him, and made a magic cabin that was full of men and tackle. He put the spell upon it, and put life in it, and gave them breath, and sank it in the water. He filled the royal boat with sand, and took leave of me, and sailed from the haven: and I sat by the river at Koptos that I might see what would become of him. And he said, 'Workmen, work for me, even at the place where the book is.' And they toiled by night and by day; and when they had reached it in three days, he threw the sand out, and made a shoal in the river. And then he found on it entwined serpents and scorpions and all kinds of crawling things around the box in which the book was; and by it he found a deathless snake around the box. And he laid the spell upon the entwined serpents and scorpions and all kinds of crawling things which were around the box, that they should not come out. And he went to the deathless snake, and fought with him, and killed him; but he came to life again, and took a new form. He then fought again with him a second time; but he came to life again, and took a third form. He then cut him in two parts, and put sand between the parts, that he should not appear again.

"Na.nefer.ka.ptah then went to the place where he found the box. He uncovered a box of iron, and opened it; he found then a box of bronze, and opened that; then he found a box of sycamore wood, and opened that; again, he found a box of ivory and ebony, and opened that; yet, he found a box of silver, and opened that; and then he found a box of gold; he opened that, and found the book in it. He took the book from the golden box, and read a page of spells from it. He enchanted the heaven and the earth, the abyss, the mountains, and the sea; he knew what the birds of the sky, the fish of the deep, and the beasts of the hills all said. He read another page of the spells, and saw the sun shining in the sky, with all the gods, the full moon, and the stars in their shapes; he saw the fishes of the deep, for a divine power was present that brought them up from the water. He then read the spell upon the workmen that he had made, and taken from the haven, and said to them, 'Work for me, back to the place from which I came.' And they toiled night and day, and so he came back to the place where I sat by the river of Koptos; I had not drunk nor eaten anything, and had done nothing on earth, but sat like one who is gone to the grave.

"I then told Na.nefer.ka.ptah that I wished to see this book, for which we had taken so much trouble. He gave the book into my hands; and when I read a page of the spells in it I also enchanted heaven and earth, the abyss, the mountains, and the sea; I also knew what the birds of the sky, the fishes of the deep, and the beasts of the hills all said. I read another page of the spells, and I saw the sun shining in the sky with all the gods, the full

moon, and the stars in their shapes; I saw the fishes of the deep, for a divine power was present that brought them up from the water. As I could not write, I asked Na.nefer.ka.ptah, who was a good writer, and a very learned one; he called for a new piece of papyrus, and wrote on it all that was in the book before him. He dipped it in beer, and washed it off in the liquid; for he knew that if it were washed off, and he drank it, he would know all that there was in the writing.

"We returned back to Koptos the same day, and made a feast before Isis of Koptos and Harpokrates. We then went to the haven and sailed, and went northward of Koptos. And as we went on Thoth discovered all that Na.nefer.ka.ptah had done with the book; and Thoth hastened to tell Ra, and said, 'Now know that my book and my revelation are with Na.nefer.ka.ptah, son of the King Mer.neb.ptah. He has forced himself into my place, and robbed it, and seized my box with the writings, and killed my guards who protected it.' And Ra replied to him, 'He is before you, take him and all his kin.' He sent a power from heaven with the command, 'Do not let Na.nefer.ka.ptah return safe to Memphis with all his kin.' And after this hour, the little boy Mer-ab, going out from the awning of the royal boat, fell into the river: he called on Ra, and everybody who was on the bank raised a cry. Na.nefer.ka.ptah went out of the cabin, and read the spell over him; he brought his body up because a divine power brought him to the surface. He read another spell over him, and made him tell of all what happened to him, and of what Thoth had said before Ra.

"We turned back with him to Koptos. We brought him to the Good House, we fetched the people to him, and made one embalm him; and we buried him in his coffin in the cemetery of Koptos like a great and noble person.

"And Na.nefer.ka.ptah, my brother, said, 'Let us go down, let us not delay, for the king has not yet heard of what has happened to him, and his heart will be sad about it.' So we went to the haven, we sailed, and did not stay to the north of Koptos. When we were come to the place where the little boy Mer-ab had fallen in the water, I went out from the awning of the royal boat, and I fell into the river. They called Na.nefer.ka.ptah, and he came out from the cabin of the royal boat; he read a spell over me, and brought my body up, because a divine power brought me to the surface. He drew me out, and read the spell over me, and made me tell him of all that had happened to me, and of what Thoth had said before Ra. Then he turned back with me to Koptos, he brought me to the Good House, he fetched the

people to me, and made one embalm me, as great and noble people are buried, and laid me in the tomb where Mer-ab my young child was.

"He turned to the haven, and sailed down, and delayed not in the north of Koptos. When he was come to the place where we fell into the river, he said to his heart, 'Shall I not better turn back again to Koptos, that I may lie by them? For, if not, when I go down to Memphis, and the king asks after his children, what shall I say to him? Can I tell him, "I have taken your children to the Thebaid, and killed them, while I remained alive, and I have come to Memphis still alive"?' Then he made them bring him a linen cloth of striped byssus; he made a band, and bound the book firmly, and tied it upon him. Na.nefer.ka.ptah then went out of the awning of the royal boat and fell into the river. He cried on Ra; and all those who were on the bank made an outcry, saying, 'Great woe! Sad woe! Is he lost, that good scribe and able man that has no equal?'

"The royal boat went on, without any one on earth knowing where Na.nefer.ka.ptah was. It went on to Memphis, and they told all this to the king. Then the king went down to the royal boat in mourning, and all the soldiers and high priests and priests of Ptah were in mourning, and all the officials and courtiers. And when he saw Na.nefer.ka.ptah, who was in the inner cabin of the royal boat--from his rank of high scribe--he lifted him up. And they saw the book by him; and the king said, 'Let one hide this book that is with him.' And the officers of the king, the priests of Ptah, and the high priest of Ptah, said to the king, 'Our Lord, may the king live as long as the sun! Na.nefer.ka.ptah was a good scribe, and a very skilful man.' And the king had him laid in his Good House to the sixteenth day, and then had him wrapped to the thirty-fifth day, and laid him out to the seventieth day, and then had him put in his grave in his resting-place.

"I have now told you the sorrow which has come upon us because of this book for which you ask, saying, 'Let it be given to me.' You have no claim to it; and, indeed, for the sake of it, we have given up our life on earth."

And Setna said to Ahura, "Give me the book which I see between you and Na.nefer.ka.ptah; for if you do not I will take it by force." Then Na.nefer.ka.ptah rose from his seat and said, "Are you Setna, to whom my wife has told of all these blows of fate, which you have not suffered? Can you take this book by your skill as a good scribe? If, indeed, you can play

games with me, let us play a game, then, of 52 points." And Setna said, "I am ready," and the board and its pieces were put before him. And Na.nefer.ka.ptah won a game from Setna; and he put the spell upon him, and defended himself with the game board that was before him, and sunk him into the ground above his feet. He did the same at the second game, and won it from Setna, and sunk him into the ground to his waist.

He did the same at the third game, and made him sink into the ground up to his ears. Then Setna struck Na.nefer.ka.ptah a great blow with his hand. And Setna called his brother An.he.hor.eru and said to him,

"Make haste and go up upon earth, and tell the king all that has happened to me, and bring me the talisman of my father Ptah, and my magic books."

And he hurried up upon earth, and told the king all that had happened to Setna. The king said, "Bring him the talisman of his father Ptah, and his magic books." And An.he.hor.eru hurried down into the tomb; he laid the talisman on Setna, and he sprang up again immediately. And then Setna reached out his hand for the book, and took it. Then--as Setna went out from the tomb--there went a Light before him, and Darkness behind him. And Ahura wept at him, and she said, "Glory to the King of Darkness! Hail to the King of Light! all power is gone from the tomb." But Na.nefer.ka.ptah said to Ahura, "Do not let your heart be sad; I will make him bring back this book, with a forked stick in his hand, and a fire-pan on his head." And Setna went out from the tomb, and it closed behind him as it was before.

Then Setna went to the king, and told him everything that had happened to him with the book. And the king said to Setna, "Take back the book to the grave of Na.nefer.ka.ptah, like a prudent man, or else he will make you bring it with a forked stick in your hand, and a fire-pan on your head." But Setna would not listen to him; and when Setna had unrolled the book he did nothing on earth but read it to everybody.

[Here follows a story of how Setna, walking in the court of the temple of Ptah, met Tabubua, a fascinating girl, daughter of a priest of Bast, of Ankhtau; how she repelled his

advances, until she had beguiled him into giving up all his possessions, and slaying his children. At the last she gives a fearful cry and vanishes, leaving Setna bereft of even his clothes. This would seem to be merely a dream, by the disappearance of Tabubua, and by Setna finding his children alive after it all; but on the other hand he comes to his senses in an unknown place, and is so terrified as to be quite ready to make restitution to Na.nefer.ka.ptah. The episode, which is not creditable to Egyptian society, seems to be intended for one of the vivid dreams which the credulous readily accept as half realities.]

So Setna went to Memphis, and embraced his children for that they were alive. And the king said to him, "Were you not drunk to do so?" Then Setna told all things that had happened with Tabubua and Na.nefer.ka.ptah. And the king said, "Setna, I have already lifted up my hand against you before, and said, 'He will kill you if you do not take back the book to the place you took it from.' But you have never listened to me till this hour. Now, then, take the book to Na.nefer.ka.ptah, with a forked stick in your hand, and a fire-pan on your head."

So Setna went out from before the king, with a forked stick in his hand, and a fire-pan on his head. He went down to the tomb in which was Na.nefer.ka.ptah. And Ahura said to him, "It is Ptah, the great god, that has brought you back safe." Na.nefer.ka.ptah laughed, and he said, "This is the business that I told you before." And when Setna had praised Na.nefer.ka.ptah, he found it as the proverb says, "The sun was in the whole tomb." And Ahura and Na.nefer.ka.ptah besought Setna greatly. And Setna said, "Na.nefer.ka.ptah, is it aught disgraceful (that you lay on me to do)?" And Na.nefer.ka.ptah said, "Setna, you know this, that Ahura and Mer-ab, her child, behold! they are in Koptos; bring them here into this tomb, by the skill of a good scribe. Let it be impressed upon you to take pains, and to go to Koptos to bring them here." Setna then went out from the tomb to the king, and told the king all that Na.nefer.ka.ptah had told him.

The king said, "Setna, go to Koptos and bring back Ahura and Mer-ab." He answered the king, "Let one give me the royal boat and its belongings." And they gave him the royal boat and its belongings, and he left the haven, and sailed without stopping till he came to Koptos.

And they made this known to the priests of Isis at Koptos and to the high priest of Isis; and behold they came down to him, and gave him their hand to the shore. He went up with them and entered into the temple of Isis of Koptos and of Harpo-krates. He ordered one to offer for him an ox, a goose, and some wine, and he made a burnt-offering and a drink-offering before Isis of Koptos and Harpokrates. He went to the cemetery of Koptos with the priests of Isis and the high priest of Isis. They dug about for three days and three nights, for they searched even in all the catacombs which were in the cemetery of Koptos; they turned over the steles of the scribes of the "double house of life," and read the inscriptions that they found on them. But they could not find the resting-place of Ahura and Mer-ab.

Now Na.nefer.ka.ptah perceived that they could not find the resting-place of Ahura and her child Mer-ab. So he raised himself up as a venerable, very old, ancient, and came before Setna. And Setna saw him, and Setna said to the ancient, "You look like a very old man, do you know where is the resting-place of Ahura and her child Mer-ab?" The ancient said to Setna, "It was told by the father of the father of my father to the father of my father, and the father of my father has told it to my father; the resting-place of Ahura and of her child Mer-ab is in a mound south of the town of Pehemato (?)" And Setna said to the ancient, "Perhaps we may do damage to Pehemato, and you are ready to lead one to the town for the sake of that." The ancient replied to Setna, "If one listens to me, shall he therefore destroy the town of Pehemato! If they do not find Ahura and her child Mer-ab under the south corner of their town may I be disgraced." They attended to the ancient, and found the resting-place of Ahura and her child Mer-ab under the south corner of the town of Pehemato. Setna laid them in the royal boat to bring them as honoured persons, and restored the town of Pehemato as it originally was. And Na.nefer.ka.ptah made Setna to know that it was he who had come to Koptos, to enable them to find out where the resting-place was of Ahura and her child Mer-ab.

So Setna left the haven in the royal boat, and sailed without stopping, and reached Memphis with all the soldiers who were with him. And when they told the king he came down to the royal boat. He took them as honoured persons escorted to the catacombs, in which Na.nefer.ka.ptah was, and smoothed down the ground over them.

This is the completed writing of the tale of Setna Kha.em.uast, and Na.nefer.ka.ptah, and his wife Ahura, and their Mid Mer-ab. It was written in the 35th year, the month Tybi.

REMARKS

This tale of Setna only exists in one copy, a demotic papyrus in the Ghizeh Museum. The demotic was published in facsimile by Mariette in 1871, among "Les Papyrus du Musee de Boulaq;" and it has been translated by Brugsch, Revillout, Maspero, and Hess. The last version--"Der Demotische Roman von Stne Ha-m-us, von J. J. Hess"--being a full study of the text with discussion and glossary, has been followed here; while the interpretation of Maspero has also been kept in view in the rendering of obscure passages.

Unhappily the opening of this tale is lost, and I have therefore restored it by a recital of the circumstances which are referred to in what remains. Nothing has been introduced which is not necessarily involved or stated in the existing text. The limit of this restoration is marked by]; the papyrus beginning with the words, "It is you who are not dealing rightly with me."

The construction is complicated by the mixture of times and persons; and we must remember that it was written in the Ptolemaic period concerning an age long past. It stood to the author much as Tennyson's "Harold" stands to us, referring to an historical age, without too strict a tie to facts and details. Five different acts, as we may call them, succeed one another. In the first act--which is entirely lost, and here only outlined--the circumstances which led Setna of the XIXth Dynasty to search for the magic book must have been related. In the second act Ahura recites the long history of herself and family, to deter Setna from his purpose. This act is a complete tale by itself, and belongs to a time some generations before Setna; it is here supposed to belong to the time of Amenhotep III., in the details of costume adopted for illustration. The third act is Setna's struggle as a rival magician to Na.nefer.ka.ptah, from which he finally comes off victorious by his brother's use of a talisman, and so secures possession of the coveted magic book. The fourth act--which I have here only summarised--shows how Na.nefer.ka.ptah resorts to a bewitchment of Setna by a sprite, by subjection to whom he loses his magic power. The fifth act shows Setna as subjected to Na.nefer.ka.ptah, and ordered by him to bring the bodies of his wife and child to Memphis into his tomb.

While, therefore, the sentimental climax of the tale--the restoration of the unity of the family in one tomb--belongs to persons of the XVIIIth Dynasty, the action of the tale is entirely of the XIXth Dynasty, for what happened in the XVIIIth Dynasty (second act) is all related in the XIXth. And the actual composition of it belongs to Ptolemaic times, not only on the evidence of the manuscript, but also of the language; this being certified by the importance of Isis and Horus at Koptos, which is essentially a late worship there.

Turning now to the details, we may note that the statement that Setna Kha.em.uast was a son of User.maat.ra (or Ramessu II.) occurs in the fourth act which is here only summarised. Among the sons of Ramessu historically known, the Prince Kha.em.uast (or "Glory-in-Thebes") was the most important; he appears to have been the eldest son, exercising the highest offices during his father's life. That the succession fell on the thirteenth son, Mer.en.ptah, was doubtless due to the elder sons having died during the preternaturally long reign of Ramessu.

The other main personage here is Na.nefer.ka.ptah (or "Excellent is the _ka_ of Ptah"), who is said to be the son of a King Mer.neb.ptah. No such name is known among historical kings; and it is probably a popular corruption or abbreviation. It was pronounced Minibptah, the r being dropped in early times. It would seem most like Mine-ptah or Mer.en.ptah, the son and successor of Ramessu II.; but as the date of Mer.neb.ptah is supposed to be some generations before that, such a supposition would involve a great confusion on the scribes' part. Another possibility is that it represents Amenhotep III., Neb.maat.ra.mer.ptah, pronounced as Nimu-rimiptah, which might be shortened to Neb.mer.ptah or Mer.neb.ptah. Such a time would well suit the tale, and that reign has been adopted here in fixing the style of the dress of Ahura and her family.

This tale shows how far the _ka_ or double might wander from its body or tomb. Here Ahura and her child lie buried at Koptos, while her husband's tomb is at Memphis. But that does not separate them in death; her _ka_ left her tomb and went down to Memphis to live with the _ka_ of her husband in his tomb. Thus, when Setna forces the tomb of Na.nefer.ka.ptah, he finds Ahura seated by him with the precious magic roll between them and the child Mer-ab; and the voluble Ahura recounts all their history, and weeps when the roll is carried away by Setna. Yet all the time her body is at Koptos, and the penalty imposed on Setna is that of bringing her body to the tomb where her _ka_ already was dwelling. If a _ka_ could thus wander so many hundred miles from its body to gratify its

affections, it would doubtless run some risks of starving, or having to put up with impure food; or might even lose its way, and rather than intrude on the wrong tomb, have to roam as a vagabond _ka._ It was to guard against these misfortunes that a supply of formulas were provided for it, by which it should obtain a guarantee against such misfortunes--a kind of spiritual directory or guide to the unprotected; and such formulas, when once accepted as valid, were copied, repeated, enlarged, and added to, until they became the complex and elaborate work--The Book of the Dead, Perhaps nothing else gives such a view of the action of the _ka_ as this tale of Setna.

There is here also an insight into the arrangement of marriages in Egypt. It does not seem that anything was determined about a marriage during childhood; it is only when the children are full-grown that a dispute arises between the king and queen as to their disposal. But the parents decide the whole question. It is, of course, well known that the Egyptians had no laws against consanguinity in marriages; on the contrary, it was with them, as with the Persians, essential for a king to marry in the royal family, and also usual for private persons to marry in their family. Even to the present day in Egypt, although sister-marriage has disappeared, yet it is the duty of a man to marry his first cousin or some one in the family. The very idea of relationship being any possible impediment to marriage was un-thought of by the Egyptian; his favourite concrete expression for a self-existent or self-created being--"husband of his mother"--shows this unmistakably.

The objection made by the king to the marriage of Na.nefer.ka.ptah and Ahura turns on the point that he has only these two children, and hence, if they marry the children of the generals, there will be two families instead of only one to ensure future posterity. The queen, however, talks the king over on the matter. The cause of Ahura's being troubled at the feast is not certain, but the king evidently supposes that she has been pleading to be allowed to marry her beloved brother, and when taxed with it she only expresses her willingness to give way to his exogamic views. The brief sentence, "I laughed and the king laughed," seems to mean that she pleased and amused her father so that he gave way, and immediately told the steward to arrange for her marriage as she desired. I have here abbreviated a few needlessly precise details. We also learn, by the way, that there was a regular registry of births, in which Mer-ab was entered.

It appears that the court was considered to be at Memphis, and not at Thebes. This would not have been so arranged had this been written in the Ramesside times, but under the

Ptolemies Memphis was the seat of the court--when not at Alexandria. The name of the priest, Nesi-ptah, also shows another anachronism. Such a name was not usual till some time after the XIXth Dynasty. Another touch of late times is in the antiquarian curiosity of Na.nefer.ka.ptah about ancient writings, "He did nothing on earth but read the writings that are in the catacombs of the kings, and the tablets of the House of Life." In the XIXth Dynasty there is no sign of interest in such records, but in the Renaissance ancient things came into fashion, all the old titles were revived, the old style was copied, and very long genealogies were worked up and carved in the inscriptions. In such an age many a _dilettante_ rich young man would amuse himself, as in this tale, with reading inscriptions and hunting up his family genealogy from the tombstones and the registers.

The firm belief in magic which underlies all this tale might perhaps be thought to be inappropriate to the enlightenment of Greek times. We have seen how in the earliest tales magic is a mainspring of the action, and it is at first sight surprising that its sway should last through so many thousands of years. But there may well have been a recrudescence of such beliefs, along with the revival of interest in the earlier history. The enormous spread and popularity of Gnosticism--the belief in the efficacy of words and formulas to control spirits and their actions--in the centuries immediately after this, shows how ingrained magic ideas were, and how ready to sprout up when the counterbalancing interests of the old mythology were gone, and their place taken by the intangible spirituality of Platonism and the early Christian atmosphere.

A most Egyptian turn is given where the priest bargains for a large payment for his funeral, and to be buried as a rich priest. The enclosing of the magic roll in a series of boxes has many parallels. In an Indian tale we read: "Round the tree are tigers and bears and scorpions and snakes; on the top of the tree is a very fat great snake; on his head is a little cage; in the cage is a bird; and my soul is in that bird" ("Golden Bough," ii. 300). In Celtic tales the series-idea also occurs. The soul of a giant is in an egg, the egg is in a dove, the dove is in a hare, the hare is in a wolf, and the wolf is in an iron chest at the bottom of the sea ("Golden Bough," ii. 314). The Tartars have stories of a golden casket containing the soul, inside a copper or silver casket ("Golden Bough," ii. 324). And the Arabs tell of a soul put in the crop of a sparrow, and the sparrow in a little box, and this in another small box, and this put into seven other boxes, and these in seven chests, and the chest in a coffer of marble ("Golden 10 Bough," ii. 318). The notion, therefore, of a series of boxes, one enclosing another, and the whole guarded by dangerous animals, is well known as an element in tales. The late date is here shown by the largest and least precious of the boxes

being of iron, which was rarely, if ever, used in Ramesside times, and was not common till the Greek age.

The magic engineering of Na.nefer.ka. ptah is very curious. The cabin or air-chamber of men in model, who are let down to work for him, suggests that Egyptians may have used the principle of a diving-bell or air-chamber for reaching parts under water. Certainly the device of raising things by dropping down sand to be put under them is still practised. An immense sarcophagus at Gizeh was raised from a deep well by natives who thrust sand under it rammed tight by a stick, and by this simple kind of hydraulic press raised it a hundred feet to the surface. In this way the magic men of Na.nefer.ka.ptah raised up the chest when they had discovered it by means of the sand which he poured over from the boat.

There is some picturesqueness in this tale, though it has not the charm of the earlier compositions. The scene of Ahura sitting for three days and nights, during the combat, watching by the side of the river, where she "had not drunk or eaten anything, and had done nothing on earth but sat like one who is gone to the grave," is a touching detail.

The light on the education of women is curious. Ahura can read the roll, but she cannot write. We are so accustomed to regard reading and writing as all one subject that the distinction is rare; but with a writing comprising so many hundred signs as the Egyptian, the art of writing or draw-Ing all the forms, and knowing which to use, is far more complex than that of reading. There are now ten students who can read an inscription for one who could compose it correctly. Here a woman of the highest rank is supposed to be able to read, but not to write; that is reserved for the skill of "a good writer, and a very learned one."

The writing of spells and then washing the ink off and drinking it is a familiar idea in the East. Modern Egyptian bowls have charms engraved on them to be imparted to the drink, and ancient Babylonian bowls are inscribed with the like purpose.

An insight into the powers of the gods is here given us. The Egyptian did not attribute to them omniscience. Thoth only discovered what Na.nefer.ka.ptah had done as they were sailing away, some days after the seizure of the book. And even Ra is informed by the complaint of Thoth. If Ra were the physical sun it would be obvious that he would see all that was being done on earth; it would rather be he who would inform Thoth. The conception of the gods must therefore have been not pantheistic or materialist, but solely as spiritual powers who needed to obtain information, and who only could act through intermediaries. Further, nothing can be done without the consent of Ra; Thoth is powerless over men, and can only ask Ra, as a sort of universal magistrate, to take notice of the offence. Neither god acts directly, but by means of a power or angel, who takes the commission to work on men. How far this police-court conception of the gods is due to Greek or foreign influence can hardly be estimated yet. It certainly does not seem in accord with the earlier appeals to Ra, and direct action of Ra, in "Anpu and Bata."

The power of spells is limited, as we have just seen the abilities of the gods were limited. The most powerful of spells, the magic book of Thoth himself, cannot restore life to a person just drowned. All that Na. nefer.ka.ptah can do with the spell is to cause the body to float and to speak, but it remains so truly dead that it is buried as if no spell had been used. Now it was recognised that the _ka_ could move about and speak to living persons, as Ahura does to Setna. Hence all that the spells do is not to alter the course of nature, but only to put the person into touch and communication with the ever-present supernatural, to enable him to know what the birds, the fishes, and the beasts all said, and to see the unseen.

Modern conceptions of the spiritual are so bound up with the sense of omnipresence and omniscience that we are apt to read those ideas into the gods and the magic of the ancients. Here we have to deal with gods who have to obtain information, and who order powers to act for them, with spells which extend the senses to the unseen, but which do not affect natural results and changes.

The inexorable fate in this tale which brings one after another of the family to die in the same spot is not due to Greek influence, though it seems akin to that. In the irrepressible transmigrations of Bata, and the successive risks of the Doomed Prince, the same ideas are seen working in the Egyptian mind. The remorse of Na.nefer.ka.ptah is a stronger touch of conscience and of shame than is seen in early times.

There is an unexplained point in the action as to how Na.nefer.ka.ptah, with the book upon him, comes up from the water, after he is drowned, into the cabin of the royal boat. The narrator had a difficulty to account for the recovery of the body without the use of the magic book, and so that stage is left unnoticed. The successive stages of embalming and mourning are detailed. The sixteen days in the Good House is probably the period of treatment of the body, the time up to the thirty-fifth day that of wrapping and decoration of the mummy cartonnage, and then the thirty-five days more of lying in state until the burial.

We now reach the third act, of Setna's struggle to get the magic roll. Here the strange episode comes in of the rival magicians gambling; it recalls the old tale of Rampsinitus descending into Hades and playing at dice with Ceres, and the frequent presence of draught-boards in the tombs, shows how much the _ka_ was supposed to relish such pleasures. The regular Egyptian game-board had three rows of ten squares, or thirty in all. Such are found from the XIIth Dynasty down to Greek times; but this form has now entirely disappeared, and the _man-galah_ of two rows of six holes, or the _tab_ of four rows of nine holes, have taken its place. Both of these are side games, where different sides belong to opposite players. The commoner _siga_ is a square game, five rows of five, or seven rows of seven holes, and has no personal sides. The ancient game was played with two, or perhaps three, different kinds of men, and the squares were counted from one end along the outer edge; but what the rules were, or how a game of fifty-two points was managed, has not yet been explained.

The strange scene of Setna being sunk into the ground portion by portion, as he loses successive games, is parallel to a mysterious story among the dervishes in Palestine. They tell how the three holy shekhs of the Dervish orders, Bedawi, Erfa'i, and Desuki, went in succession to Baghdad to ask for a jar of water of Paradise from the Derwisha Bint Bari, who seems to be a sky-genius, controlling the meteors. The last applicant, Desuki, was refused like the others; so he said, "Earth! swallow her," and the earth swallowed her to her knees; still she gave not the water, so he commanded the earth, and she was swallowed to her waist; a third time she refused, and she was swallowed to her breasts; she then asked him to marry her, which he would not; a fourth time she refused the water and was swallowed to her neck. She then ordered a servant to bring the water ("Palestine Exploration Statement, 1894," p. 32). The resemblance is most remarkable in two tales

two thousand years apart; and the incident of Bint Bari asking the dervish to marry her has its connection with this tale. Had the dervish done so he would--according to Eastern beliefs--have lost his magic power over her, just as Setna loses his magic power by his alliance with Tabubua, to which he is tempted by Na.nefer.ka.ptah, in order to subdue him. The talisman here is a means of subduing magic powers, and is of more force than that of Thoth, as Ptah is greater than he.

The fourth act recounts the overcoming of the power of Setna by Na.nefer.ka.ptah, who causes Tabubua to lead to the loss of his superior magic, and thus to subdue him to the magic of his rival. Ankhtau, here named as the place of Tabubua, was a quarter of Memphis, which is also named as the place of the wife of Uba-ner in the first tale.

The fifth act describes the victory of Na.nefer.ka.ptah, and his requiring Setna to reunite the family in his tomb at Memphis. The contrast between Ahura's pious ascription to Ptah, and her husband's chuckle at seeing his magic successful, is remarkable. Setna at once takes the position of an inferior by addressing praises to Na.nefer.ka.ptah: after which the tomb became bright as it was before he took away the magic roll. Setna then having made restitution, is required to give some compensation as well.

The search for the tomb of Ahura and Mer-ab is a most tantalising passage. The great cemetery of Koptos is the scene, and the search occupies three days and nights in the catacombs and on the steles. Further, the tomb was at the south corner of the town of Pehemato, as Maspero doubtfully reads it. Yet this cemetery is now quite unknown, and in spite of all the searching of the native dealers, and the examination which I have made on the desert of both sides of the Nile, it is a mystery where the cemetery can be. The statement that the tomb was at the south corner of a town pretty well excludes it from the desert, which runs north and south there. And it seems as if it might have been in some raised land in the plain, like the spur or shoal on which the town of Koptos was built. If so it would have been covered by the ten to twenty feet rise of the Nile deposits since the time of its former use.

The appearance of the ancient to guide Setna gives some idea of the time that elapsed between then and the death of Ahura. The ancient, who must be allowed to represent two or three generations, says that his great-grandfather knew of the burial, which would take

it back to five or six generations. This would place the death of Ahura about 150 years before the latter part of the reign of Ramessu II., say 1225 B.C.: thus, being taken back to about 1375 B.C., would make her belong to the generation after Amenhotep III., agreeing well with Mer.neb. ptah, being a corruption of the name of that king. No argument could be founded on so slight a basis; but at least there is no contradiction in the slight indications which we can glean.

The fear of Setna is that this apparition may have come to bring him into trouble by leading him to attack some property in this town; and Setna is particularly said to have restored the ground as it was before, after removing the bodies.

The colophon at the end is unhappily rather illegible. But the thirty-fifth year precludes its belonging to the reign of any Ptolemy, except the IInd or the VIIIth; and by the writing Maspero attributes it to the earlier of these reigns.