

EGYPTIAN TALES



THE QUEEN'S TRIAL (A. 65)

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EGYPTIAN TALES

TRANSLATED FROM THE PAPYRI

SECOND SERIES
XVIIIth TO XIXth DYNASTY

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METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET, STRAND
LONDON

1895

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PREFACE

AS the scope of the first series of these Tales seems to have been somewhat overlooked, a few words of introduction may not be out of place before this second volume.

It seems that any simple form of fiction is supposed to be a "fairy tale:" which implies that it has to do with an impossible world of imaginary beings. Now the Egyptian Tales are exactly the opposite of this, they relate the doings and the thoughts of men and women who are human—sometimes "very human," as Mr. Balfour said. Whatever there is of supernatural elements is a very part of the beliefs and motives of the

people whose lives are here pictured. But most of what is here might happen in some corner of our own country to-day, where ancient beliefs may have a home. So far, then, from being fairy tales there is not a single being that could be termed a fairy in the whole of them.

Another notion that seems to be about is that the only possible object of reading any form of fiction is for pure amusement, to fill an idle hour and be forgotten : and if these tales are not as amusing as some jester of to-day, then the idler says, Away with them as a failure ! For such a person, who only looks to have the tedium of a vacuous mind relieved, these tales are not in the least intended. But the real and genuine charm of all fiction is that of enabling the reader to place himself in the mental position of another, to see with the eyes, to feel with the thoughts, to reason with the mind, of a wholly different being. All the greatest work has this charm. It may be to place the reader

in new mental positions, or in a different level of the society that he already knows, either higher or lower ; or it may be to make alive to him a society of a different land or age. Whether he read "Treasure Island" or "Plain Tales from the Hills," "The Scarlet Letter," "Old Mortality," or "Hypatia," it is the transplanting of the reader into a new life, the doubling of his mental experience, that is the very power of fiction. The same interest attaches to these tales. In place of regarding Egyptians only as the builders of pyramids and the makers of mummies, we here see the men and women as they lived, their passions, their foibles, their beliefs, and their follies. The old refugee Sanehat craving to be buried with his ancestors in the blessed land, the enterprise and success of the Doomed Prince, the sweetness of Bata, the misfortunes of Ahura, these all live before us, and we can for a brief half hour share the feelings and see with the eyes of those who ruled the world when it was young. This is the real

value of these tales, and the power which still belongs to the oldest literature in the world.

Erratum in First Edition, 1st Series. Page 31, line 6 from below, *for* no It *read* not I.

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