

If, therefore, we would find a source of mental culture, at once stimulating and steady; imparting both the inspiration and spring of original thought, and the just metes and bounds of its practical application, that source may be sought preëminently in the ancient classical literature; not only as it affords us the means of comparing the present with the past, thus enabling us to correct our estimates, formed under the biasing influences of the fashions and opinions of the moment; but also as containing more strictly defined, and more clearly and purely expressed, than can be found elsewhere, out of the holy Scriptures, the sound maxims of social and civil conduct; the just rules of a virtuous and noble life, and the true ends and methods in the profounder spheres of speculation and rational inquiry.

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## ARTICLE V.

### THE CASTES OF ANCIENT EGYPT.

From the French of J. J. Ampère, by John W. May, Esq., Roxbury.<sup>1</sup>

If there is any opinion generally received, it is that the ancient Egyptian people was divided into castes devoted exclusively to special functions, which passed from parents to children in hereditary succession. On the one hand was the caste of priests; on the other, the military caste; while entirely distinct and separate, and below these two superior castes, were ranged the different professions; their functions being likewise subject to hereditary transmission, the children necessarily continuing in the condition of their fathers. Such is the idea of the ancient organization of Egyptian society.

From the earliest times this opinion has been at intervals reproduced. When Bossuet said: "The law assigned to each his office, which was perpetuated from father to son, and they could neither exercise two professions, nor change their profession," he only reproduced an assertion a thousand times repeated before, and which is still repeated. It is also emphatically so stated by Meiners, author of a special work

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upon the castes of Egypt. "The two orders (that of the priest and the soldier), were so circumscribed," says the learned professor of Göttingen, "that the son almost always followed the steps of the father, and that he was accustomed or constrained to embrace the same kind of life with his ancestors." In the classical manual of archaeology of Otfried Müller, it is said that in Egypt, "to each function men were hereditarily devoted." I could cite a great number of similar passages. Rossellini alone, warned by the monuments, has ventured to raise a doubt; but the brief space which such a question could be allowed to occupy in his great work, and conclusions too vague, and founded, perhaps, upon insufficient data, did not permit him to give a prejudice, so ancient and so inveterate, a decisive blow. This, it is now my purpose to attempt.

I shall endeavor to show that the idea, which has so long obtained, that ancient Egyptian society was divided into castes, each one of which was set apart to a special, exclusive and hereditary occupation, is incorrect, and, of course, that the censure and the praise which that society has by turns received, on this account, were alike unfounded. I think I shall be able to establish with certainty:

1. That there were no castes at all in ancient Egypt, taking the word rigorously, in the sense, for example, in which it is applicable to India, although many of the learned, and, among others, Bohlen, have affirmed the contrary;

2. That many important professions, those of the priest, the soldier, the lawyer, and some others, were not always hereditary;

3. That there was only a marked distinction between the different portions of Egyptian society, a distinction which exists everywhere between those who follow the liberal professions, and those who follow the arts and trades.

Against assertions repeated from age to age, I shall invoke the evidence of but one class of witnesses; but this seems to me irrefutable. I mean the evidence of monuments and inscriptions.

To those who do not believe that the true key for the interpretation of the hieroglyphics has been found by Champollion, I have nothing to say. In their opinion, I am a dreamer; in mine, they shut their eyes to the light of day. Discussion between us is impossible.

Those who, without pronouncing upon the degree of perfection to which the power of deciphering hieroglyphic inscriptions has been carried, are agreed as to the principle of this process (and I believe I may safely say, they constitute the great majority of the savans who have examined the subject), will have the right to demand of me

a strict account of the manner in which I may have applied the method of Champollion, and I do not deny my obligation to satisfy them. In fact, the whole economy of my argument rests upon hieroglyphic texts interpreted according to the principles laid down in his *Egyptian Grammar*. I have an intimate and profound conviction of the truth of these principles, founded upon personal observation of the thousands of inscriptions to be found in the different museums of Europe, and of the monuments of Egypt and Nubia, among which I have spent many months; but I believe neither in the infallibility nor the universal science of Champollion. While I admit that his grammar may be sometimes corrected, and oftener, in some parts, completed, I think, nevertheless, that until some mistake which requires correction, or some part which requires completion, be pointed out, or some error demonstrated, we must provisionally admit the truth of the rules established by Champollion, and based upon such a multitude of examples. Such, in my opinion, is the course required by the existing state of the science of hieroglyphical interpretation. More than this would be but a blind confidence; and less than this, would, as it seems to me, be to despise a discovery susceptible of improvement, no doubt, but which, even now, may be advantageously applied to historical research. It is an application of this kind which I propose now to make.

It is proper that I define, at the outset, the limit within which the instrument of which I am about to make use, must be restrained, in order that the results therefrom may inspire a legitimate confidence. In the present state of the science, there is a portion of the hieroglyphic text which cannot be translated with any certainty; and this portion is by far the most considerable. Not that the method of Champollion is here in default; but because the syntax, which shows the connection between phrases, is not sufficiently well known to enable us always to perceive their connection, and especially because our vocabulary is not yet sufficiently rich to permit us to interpret either the still unknown meaning of certain characters, or the value of certain words which we can read with certainty, but the signification of which is not found in that small portion of the Coptic language (derived, as we know, from the ancient Egyptian), which has been preserved to us through Christian legends, and some fragmentary translations from the sacred books; the authors of these fragments having neither the means nor the intention of transmitting to us all the words of the Egyptian language, and more especially those which related to forgotten usages and an abrogated worship.

Nevertheless, if candor compels us to admit that the reading of a considerable portion of the Egyptian texts is still impossible, it may be affirmed, on the other hand, with confidence, that there is another portion which can be read with certainty. To this comparatively limited portion, and to this alone, do I now address myself. I shall leave aside all that would be susceptible of a doubtful interpretation; and rest entirely for my support upon translations of very frequent expressions, of short and simple phrases about the meaning of which there can be no doubt among those who recognize the authority of Champollion's principles. With these preliminaries I come to the question of the existence of castes in Ancient Egypt.

Let us begin by determining, with precision, the meaning of the word *caste*. It comes from the Portuguese *casta*, meaning *family*, *stock*, or *lineage*. But *caste* is not the only word, descriptive of the peculiarities of Oriental society, which we derive from the Portuguese. *Mandarin* and *bayadere* mean, in that language, the one a magistrate, and the other a *danseuse*. Those who think to give to their discourse a local coloring, by the use of these expressions, must renounce the satisfaction of availing themselves, in French, of a Chinese or an Indian word. All that they can hope thereby is to show that if they are ignorant of the Oriental languages, they are not less ignorant of those of Europe.

It is with reference to India that, at this day, the word *caste* is especially employed. In that country the four orders of ancient Hindû society, such as the institutions of Manû and the great national epopees, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahâbhârata* present them, are each designated as a caste. These four orders are the *Brâhmins*, or the order of priests and legislators, the *Kshatriyas*, or soldiers, the *Vêsiyas*, or merchants, and the *Sâdras*, or servants.

The word *caste* is also applied to an innumerable multitude of subdivisions of the principal castes. Each of these subdivisions is there devoted to some particular trade or profession. Each individual member of any of these castes must hold himself aloof from all alliance, often from all contact with individuals, and is interdicted from all callings, foreign to his caste. If he fail in either of these obligations, *he loses caste*.

Thus three conditions seem to me essential to the existence of a caste: to abstain from certain professions which are foreign and interdicted, to avoid all alliance with those not members of the same caste, and to continue in the profession which has been handed down from father to son. Although these conditions have not always been

rigorously fulfilled in the East, and almost never in the West, the word *caste* has been applied, by a little mischievous exaggeration, to the aristocratic and sacerdotal classes of our modern societies. Caste, properly speaking, has never in reality existed in a Christian state; for it is a social fact incompatible with that equality among men proclaimed by Christianity. The nobility and the clergy have never constituted true castes in the absolute sense of the word, but the term has been applied to these orders because they were marked by some of the distinguishing characteristics of caste, that is to say, exclusive special professions; among the nobles, hereditary professions and also a more or less constant abstinence from connection with others out of the class to which an individual may belong.

In India, the distinction between the castes seems to arise from a diversity of race; the Sanskrit word *varna*, by which the four principal castes are designated, as is well known, means color. This would appear to indicate between the castes a difference of color, and hence a difference of origin. This explanation derives weight from the fact, that the population of the north of India, the evident point of departure of the superior races, show, in the configuration of the countenance, traits which clearly distinguish them from the races of the south, which seem to have furnished the elements of the inferior castes.

But is anything like this to be found in ancient Egypt? I can discover no trace of it. On the walls of the temples and tombs, kings, subjects, priests, soldiers, offer the same physical type. The color of the skin is the same, and no difference of physiognomy indicates a variety of race. If one had existed, Egyptian art, which speaks so clearly in the captives of the African and Asiatic type, would not have failed to reproduce it here.

Whatever may be the supposed origin of castes, let us see if, in fact, they ever existed at all in ancient Egypt. In the examination of this question, I shall address myself to the monuments alone, and especially to that most numerous class of Egyptian monuments, the monuments to the dead. It is to hieroglyphic inscriptions traced upon the walls of the tombs, upon the sides of the sarcophagi, and principally upon the *stelae* or grave-stones, that I shall look for a solution to the questions upon which I am engaged.

And these monuments must furnish a peremptory response. In fact, they always indicate the name of the departed and of his relatives, with their degree of relationship, oftentimes the profession which each followed, and sometimes even the name and the profession of the relations of the wife of the deceased. By the aid of these we

can construct a genealogical tree of an Egyptian family, often very numerous, ascertain the professions of its various members, and follow their alliances through many generations. I have myself constructed a large number of them, some of them running through seven generations; I can cite one which mentions a hundred relatives. Let us see, then, if these texts, upon a close examination, will not furnish us the answers we are seeking.

I can safely say that, among the learned, all, or nearly all, are agreed upon the meaning of those hieroglyphic signs which stand for *father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, etc.*, which designate the principal conditions, the principal titles, sacerdotal, civil, military, and so forth. This very limited vocabulary, which I purposely restrict within narrow bounds to render it more certain, this inconsiderable number of expressions, the sense of which has in general been determined by the grammar of Champollion, or which I have had the opportunity to verify by hundreds of examples, will enable us to arrive, with the fewest possible chances of error, at results which will present, as it seems to me, something of historical interest and a certain novelty.

In the first place, were there in Egypt a sacerdotal and a military caste? The monuments prove: 1. That the sacerdotal and military functions were not exclusive of each other, but, on the contrary, associated together, and each of them also with civil functions, the same individual having a sacerdotal, a civil and a military title;

2. That a person of the military order might intermarry with the daughter of one of the priests;

3. That members of the same family, the father and the son, or sons of a common father, might fill promiscuously the offices of the three different orders. When I shall have proved that the same individuals, or members of the same family, did actually follow the professions attributed to the different castes, and that these professions did not, of necessity, pass from father to son, what will then be left of the Egyptian castes, and of the universally hereditary transmission of professions?

Now, in studying the monuments, and particularly the funereal *stelae*, which so abound in the museums, and so many of which have been published, it is not a rare thing to find sacerdotal and military titles united upon one and the same *stela*. I will cite, among others, the sarcophagus, preserved in the British Museum, of a priest of the goddess Athor, who was a commander of infantry.

If the office of the priest did not exclude that of the soldier, it was still more consistent with that of the civilian. An association of this

kind is found in one of those curious hypogea of *El-Tell*, the sides of which are covered with such strange figures; where we find kings with the breasts of females adoring an image of the sun whose rays are terminated by hands. This dates no further back than B. C. 1800, only a moderate antiquity in Egyptian matters; but I found the same association between the religious and administrative functions, in one of the tombs contemporaneous with the pyramids, and, of course, already very old at the period I have just mentioned.

These facts bear witness against the supposition of the existence of special functions attributed to a class of men under the domination of castes.

And what is a sacerdotal caste, the members of which, while they are priests, are at the same time generals, governors, judges, or architects?

Will it be said, as it has been, that civil duties united with those of the priesthood, were the monopoly of the priests? But often, very often, the name of him who exercises these civil functions is accompanied by no sacerdotal designation. Thus the Egyptian priests were invested with different judicial offices, but these offices were not their exclusive appanage. The laity were invested with them as well. The right of administering justice was not, then, the special attribute of the priesthood; but a man could be judge whether he was a priest or not. What more contrary to the exclusive spirit of castes? We ourselves have not gone to that extent of liberality. We are even more exclusive than were the Egyptians; for, with us, a priest is disqualified for a judge. But if the priest and the soldier were united in the same person, so also were the priest and the civilian; the same man was chief of archers, and intendant of southern Egypt, superintendant of public works, and commander of foreign soldiers.

If there were, as Bossuet and Meiners maintain, if there were exclusive professions to which children were set apart from their birth, without the power or possibility of change, they are not mentioned in the monumental inscriptions, for all these may be associated with others. Two or more offices united in the same person was a fact of frequent occurrence in ancient Egypt. Instead of this line of demarkation which has been so generally supposed to exist between the different classes, confusion was carried so far that we find persons charged with military, civil and sacerdotal functions at once. These are often found together in the celebrated tombs of Beni-Hassan.

This is the first breach made in the opinion which I am combating. I shall now open a second by showing that the different classes intermarried. Upon examination of the inscriptions, it appears that

an officer of the army espoused the daughter of a priest, and reciprocally. I shall soon have occasion to cite a remarkable instance of this kind of alliance. Meanwhile, let it be observed, that, after what has been said, it could not be expected otherwise. The repugnance of castes against alliances with individuals born out of their own order, rests upon the separation of the respective professions. Priests will not mingle their blood with that of the soldier — the sacred with the profane — nor will the soldier mingle his with that of the family which he despises, because it is devoted to the arts of peace. But when priests are soldiers, and *vice versa*, as was the case in Egypt, and when both exercise civil professions, as was also the case there, there is no place for that mutual contempt and antipathy, which are the real obstacle in the way of union. The isolation of classes has no longer any motive when the occupations of the classes are no longer separate; so that a nobleman, who has made commerce his business, feels no hesitation in bestowing his daughter upon a merchant.

I come now to the demonstration of the non-hereditary quality of the professions, as my last argument against the commonly received opinion.

No doubt there existed, as the monuments prove, certain families, many members of which were specially set apart and religiously consecrated to such or such a divinity. Here the paternal religion and, oftentimes, the paternal priesthood were hereditary, and there was, among brothers, a community of the same. It is, however, not to be denied, that examples can be cited of the hereditary transmission of the civil and military functions. A very remarkable instance of this I will not be so disingenuous as to conceal. In one of the tombs which surround the pyramids, I found a superintendant of the royal public works, under Cheops, the builder of the great pyramid, who was a son of the man previously holding the same office under the same Pharaoh. But facts of this kind do not prove that offices were always hereditary; for similar facts present themselves in the history of every society, however remote from the institution of castes. There is in all societies a natural and oftentimes unjust tendency to keep certain offices within the family, and, if the right line fails, to secure them to the collateral relations. This abuse exists in our days, under the name of nepotism, a practice which the indiscretion of the hieroglyphs has shown us to date from the time of king Cheops and to be as ancient as the pyramids.

That the child sometimes inherited the office of the father, and perhaps without being worthy of it, is not, therefore, a fact peculiar



to Egyptian society; it is a fact common to all times, from which no conclusion can be drawn, while from that other fact, which it remains for me to establish, that oftentimes offices were not hereditary, it follows necessarily that that society was not subject to the privileges of castes, the very spirit and essence of which is to be absolute and isolated, and can have no existence when the hereditary transmission of the professions is not the constant and invariable usage.

Now, if we may believe the monuments, the hereditary transmission of the professions was neither a universal custom nor a rigorous law, as is contended by Meiners. Civil, religious and military functions are not necessarily hereditary. The son of a soldier may be a priest, and the son of a priest may be a soldier. It is not rare to find a civil functionary who has sons in both the other professions. Finally, to complete the ruin of the hypothesis of exclusive professions to which particular families were devoted, and, by consequence, the hypothesis of caste, we find, that in the same family, sons of the same parents are found in all the different conditions. On this point I could cite a great number of examples, amounting almost to demonstration by the unanimity of their testimony; but they would be fatiguing from their very uniformity. I prefer, in concluding, to concentrate the attention of the reader upon a monument contained in the museum at Naples, which, alone, would suffice to sustain the thesis which it has been the purpose of these pages to establish.

This monument is of granite, in the form of a truncated *biseau*, or bevelled quadrangular shaft. On its anterior face are nine figures in basso-relievo, each bearing a hieroglyphic inscription. These nine figures, as the inscriptions indicate, represent, one of them, the deceased in honor of whom the monument was erected, and the others, the different members of his family, whose professions are stated. The deceased occupies the fourth place from the right of the spectator, and beyond, to the left, are the figures of his father, his three brothers, and a paternal uncle. On the right are the father and two brothers of his wife. On the posterior face, are six figures representing relatives of the deceased, among which are his mother, wife, wife's mother, and maternal aunts. On each of the two lateral faces are three relations, making in all a family of twenty-one.

The person in honor of whom the stone was erected, was a general of infantry, and, if I do not mistake the character which follows this title, he was an officer of foreign infantry. Besides his military title he has also a civil one. He is called "superintendent of the constructions of ———," the character for which the blank is substituted

not being quite clear to me. His elder brother has the title of superintendant of constructions, and also that of priest of the god of Empha. The latter was therefore at once priest and architect, perhaps sacred, while his brother may have been a civil architect. His second brother, like the elder, has a sacerdotal title; the third has the singular title of royal son, and seems to have been a provincial governor. Here, then, are two brothers of a military man (who probably also held a civil appointment), whose functions are purely sacerdotal. The third has an administrative function and a princely title. The father is priest of Ammon. As to the family of the wife of the deceased it is entirely sacerdotal. She and her mother are devoted to Ammon; her father, brother and two maternal uncles, are priests of different gods. Nevertheless, this sacerdotal family is found to be connected by marriage with a general of infantry.

It appears, therefore, that members of the same family belonged, some to what has been termed the military caste, others, to what has been termed the religious caste; so that, if these castes did really exist, two brothers belonged to two different castes; a fact which, with our notions of caste, it is difficult to comprehend. We have seen also that the same individual, engaged in both sacerdotal and military duties, might have belonged at the same time to two distinct castes; a fact just as incomprehensible as the other.

There were, therefore, no castes in Egypt. That there were, is a common error, which it is time to renounce. Those who regret it, may find consolation in the fact that enough others remain.

Instead of this division of Egyptian society, I find another. I observe that the professions which figure upon the monuments are always the same: priests, soldiers, judges, superintendants of construction, governors of a district or a province; these are, save some few which seem to be purely honorary, the only titles which appear upon the monuments to the dead. The other professions or callings, such as that of laborer, agriculturist, artisan, physician even — what is very surprising after all that has been said upon the subject of Egyptian medicine — have not hitherto been found at all. That kind of honor which consists in representing the deceased receiving the homage of his family, and honoring the gods with prayers for their protection in the world whither he has gone, is never accorded to any other professions than those first enumerated.

This circumstance seems to me to establish a fundamental distinction between the classes — I do not say castes — between the professions regarded as eminent and which had a right to be mentioned and

represented on sepulchral monuments, and the professions which were not deemed worthy of that honor.

It remains for me to show what were the grounds of the prejudice I have been combating; an error is not completely refuted until it is explained.

Abuse has been made, it seems to me, of divers passages of Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus and Plato, in order to construct the phantom of Egyptian castes. These passages contain assertions, not false perhaps, but greatly exaggerated, and, as often happens, this exaggeration has lost nothing by reproduction. Thus Herodotus asserts, too absolutely, that military functions were hereditary; Diodorus Siculus says the same of the sacerdotal functions, and Plato affirms the distinction of classes. But these assertions, founded, it must be agreed, upon certain real facts, but marked with a certain air of exaggeration and a want of precision, have been less the cause than the occasion of error. The authors themselves went a little too far, and their followers have gone still further, gradually withdrawing from the reality and approaching a system. This is the history of the rise of error generally. An observation is taken more generally and absolutely than intended to be taken by the author; the spirit of system stretches, distorts and exaggerates an assertion which, though generally true, is not so precisely and literally, and continues to push it until what was limitedly true, becomes positively false, and then time supervenes to consecrate the falsehood which it has made. Such is the history of the establishment of numberless historical errors, errors too, which cannot always be laid bare to posterity by the light of hieroglyphics.

The light of hieroglyphics! Yes, the inspired hand of Champollion has kindled a light, the ever-increasing brightness of which will pierce the darkness of that night from which it was drawn. The glory of Champollion is already among the brightest in the annals of French erudition; and the efforts consequent upon his discovery will shed new lustre upon his genius. His method has already won the approbation of the learned world, in England, in Italy, in Germany and in America. And shall not France honor it? And is not the highest honor which can be offered, to continue it? Shall France be led, by an unworthy and ungrateful misunderstanding, to renounce one of the highest claims to honor which she has received from the present century? It must not be so. And if the unaccountable aberrations of some would send us back in the path of science, again to look for what has already been found, and to seek in the land of

dreams, what genius has already brought within the sphere of reality, I oppose to this blindness the voice of learned Europe, the authority of the Academy of Inscriptions, and the labors of many of its members. It is in the steps of these my illustrious colleagues that I have, in this paper, endeavored to tread; and encouraged by their voice and their example I have essayed this first application of the method of Champollion to the elucidation of an important fact in the history of the civilization, still imperfectly known, of ancient Egypt.

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## ARTICLE VI.

### THE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY.

By Rev. Charles White, D. D., President of Wabash College, Ia.

CHRISTIANITY<sup>1</sup> has been represented as the most efficient agency existing in our world, as able to arouse and revolutionize all that ought to be excited and changed. Possessing such a wakeful, enterprising, renovating spirit, it becomes important to inquire, whether it holds along with it any sufficient, guiding, moderating principle, to prevent extravagances and violence.

Such a principle and power it contains preëminently within itself. It has a balancing, controlling provision, capable of keeping right, steady, straight onward, every human movement for the reform and elevation of man and society. Christianity is no less remarkable as a cautious guide, an efficient conservator, than as an aggressor and transformer.

Before entering upon a discussion of the conservatism of Christianity, it may be proper, as there exists a deep and extensive prejudice against everything which bears this name, to offer a preliminary observation, on the true meaning and use of the term. This word expresses no disrelish, distrust or resistance of actual melioration and advancement. Conservatism is no enemy to human progress. It is no lazy alarmist, uttering forebodings over what is to come; no

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<sup>1</sup> By this term is meant everywhere in this discussion a pure, protestant Christianity.