

THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROSETTA STONE.

BY THE EDITOR.

ONE of the most famous pieces of the British Museum is the Rosetta Stone which faces the entrance and is the first object of importance which greets the visitor. It is famous all over the world; yet its history and significance are little known and a comprehensive work on it has been written only now by Professor E. A. Wallis Budge, Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum. The book contains everything that is connected with the history of the stone, publishes a facsimile of the text, translations of the hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek versions in Latin, French and English; it contains the history of its decipherment and adds also the texts and translations of some kindred documents, all of which have contributed their share to the explanation of the ancient Egyptian inscriptions, language and literature. The literature of the Rosetta Stone has become quite considerable and in the present work of Budge nothing is overlooked or neglected. "The Hieroglyphic text of the Rosetta Stone is given (with additions from the Stele of Damanhûr) in hieroglyphic type, together with interlinear transliteration and translation, and a running translation. The demotic text will be found in facsimile on the large plate which has been especially prepared for this work, and an English rendering, with a transliteration, will be found in the second volume. The Greek text is given, both in 'inscription type' and in transcript, the latter being arranged with a page for page English translation. At the end of each of these sections will be found reprints of all the principal translations of the inscriptions of the Rosetta Stone in English, French, German, Latin, etc., which were made between 1802 and 1901; they illustrate the history and progress of Egyptian decipherment, and the reader will find them useful for purposes of comparison."

As to the claims of Young and Champollion, Professor Budge formerly embraced the cause of the latter and following the traditional opinion of former Egyptologists spoke of Young's labors as "beneath contempt," but he was converted by John Leitch's book, *Life and Works of Thomas Young*, so he felt that he should make amends for his former mistake. He did so in a former book of his which appeared under the title *The Mummy*, and he says in the preface of the present book:

"I tried to right the wrong by describing at some length the work which both Young and Champollion had done, and by proving that Young was indeed the first to discover the order in which the hieroglyphics were to be read, and also the first to assign correct values to several of the alphabetic characters in the names of Ptolemy and Berenice, some three or four years before Champollion published the pamphlet which caused him to be considered, in some quarters, the veritable discoverer of Egyptian hieroglyphic decipherment."

Young's priority as to several most important discoveries in the decipherment of hieroglyphics must be conceded, although every Egyptologist will admit that in the consciousness of his success Young "went too fast" and with an insufficient supply of facts made many rash guesses and mistakes, but without the key furnished by Young, Champollion could not have accomplished the work he did, and he in turn was followed by Birch, Lepsius and other more modern scholars.

Professor Budge tells us of the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, incorporating as appendices the letter of Major-General Henry Turner and Mathew Rapes' account. He republishes the oldest descriptions of the stone and explains the oldest methods of decipherment, together with the several versions of its first decipherers. He allows us an insight into Young's methods of analysis and also into the labors of Champollion.

It is well known that names have given the first clue to the decipherment of the Egyptian alphabet, among them the names of Ptolemy, Berenice and Cleopatra. The latter name, however, does not occur in the Rosetta Stone as is frequently assumed, but in an obelisk discovered by Major J. W. Bankes at Philae, and so Professor Budge adds a chapter on this famous obelisk with transcriptions and translations of both the Greek and Egyptian texts.

The Rosetta Stone is broken on some of its corners, but "the ends of the twenty-six lines of the Greek version were admirably restored by the eminent philologist Porson, very soon after the discovery of the stone, and the fact that his restorations have been accepted

by scholars generally is an eloquent testimony to their correctness. Thus we may conclude that we know the contents of the Decree both in its Egyptian forms and in its Greek rendering."

The contents of the stone is a decree of the Egyptian priesthood which records the generosity of "Ptolemy, the ever-living, beloved of Ptah." It speaks of his beneficence to the whole country Tamerit (Egypt). It promises the remission of taxes to the soldiers and the priests. It contains an amnesty for prisoners and a release of punishment. It extends the privilege to boatmen not to be pressed into service in the navy. It restores the property of those who during the revolution which had just taken place fought against the government, on condition that they would return and cease being ill disposed. It describes the capture of the town Shekam by King Ptolemy, and makes endowments to temples, shrines and chapels. In grateful remembrance of this generosity the priesthood promises that his name shall henceforth be "the saviour of Egypt" and the statue of the king shall be set up side by side with the statue of the Lord (probably of the gods) and this decree shall be written upon a stele of hard stone "in the writing of the words of the gods, in the writing of the books, and in the writing of *Hani-Nebui*, i. e., Greek, and shall be set up in the sanctuaries of the temples of his name."

In the third volume of this work it has been thought advisable to give the texts, with translations, from the Stele of Canopus, because the decree of the priests, which is inscribed upon it in the hieroglyphic, Greek and demotic characters, has a great deal in common with the decree of the priests of Memphis which is inscribed on the Rosetta Stone. The texts on one monument help to explain those on the other, the phraseology is in many cases identical, and taken together the two documents, between the promulgation of which there is an interval of rather more than forty years, supply information concerning the relations which existed between the priests and Ptolemy III. and Ptolemy V., and the development of sacerdotal power, which cannot be obtained from any other source. The two large plates, which have been specially prepared for the third volume, illustrate the palaeography of the Stele of Canopus, and the vocabulary which has been added will enable the reader to compare the words common to the two texts.

These three volumes have been incorporated in the series of the books on Egypt and Chaldea. They are indispensable to the Egyptologist and at the same time of interest to all those who take an interest in things oriental and the history of the sciences.