## CHAPTER VI

# THE TEMPERAMENT OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS

A CERTAIN school geography book, now out of date, condenses its remarks upon the character of our Gallic cousins into the following pregnant sentence: "The French are a gay and frivolous nation, fond of dancing and red wine." The description would so nearly apply to the ancient inhabitants of Egypt, that its adoption here as a text to this chapter cannot be said to be extravagant. The unbiased enquirer into the affairs of ancient Egypt must discover ultimately, and perhaps to his regret that the dwellers on the Nile were a "gay and frivolous people," festive, light-hearted, and mirthful, "fond of dancing and red wine," and pledged to all that is brilliant in life. There are very many people, naturally, who hold to those views which their forefathers held before them, and picture the Egyptians as a sombre, gloomy people; replete with thoughts of Death and of the more melancholy aspect of religion; burdened with the menacing presence of a multitude of horrible gods and demons, whose priests demanded the erection of vast temples for their appeasement; having little joy of this life, and much uneasy conjecture about the next; making entertainment in solemn gatherings and ponderous feasts; and holding merriment in holy contempt. Of the five startling classes into which the dictionary divides the human temperament, namely, the bilious or choleric, the phlegmatic, the sanguine, the melancholic, and the nervous, it is probable that the first, second, and the fourth would be those assigned to the Ancient Egyptians by these people. This view is so entirely false that one will be

forgiven if, in the attempt to dissolve it, the gaiety of the race is thrust before the reader with too little qualification. The sanguine, and perhaps the nervous, are the classes of temperament under which the Egyptians must be docketed. It cannot be denied that they were an industrious and even a strenuous people, that they indulged in the most serious thoughts, and attempted to study the most complex problems of life, and that the ceremonial side of their religion occupied a large part of their time. But there is abundant evidence to show that, like their descendants of the present day, they were one of the least gloomy peoples of the world, and that they took their duties in the most buoyant manner, allowing as much sunshine to radiate through their minds as shone from the cloudless Egyptian skies upon their dazzling country.

It is curiously interesting to note how general is the present belief in the solemnity of this ancient race's attitude towards existence, and how little their real character is appreciated. Already the reader will be protesting, perhaps, that the application of the geographer's summary of French characteristics to the ancient Egyptians lessens in no wise its ridiculousness, but rather increases it. Let the protest, however, be held back for a while. Even if the Egyptians were not always frivolous, they were always uncommonly gay, and any slight exaggeration will be pardoned in view of the fact that old prejudices have to be violently overturned, and the stigma of melancholy and ponderous sobriety torn from the national name. It would be a matter of little surprise to some good persons if the products of excavations in the Nile Valley consisted largely of antique black gloves.

Like many other nations the ancient Egyptians rendered mortuary service to their ancestors, and solid tomb-chapels had to be constructed in honour of the more important dead. Both for the purpose of preserving the mummy intact, and also in order to keep the ceremonies going for as long a period of time as possible, these

chapels were constructed in a most substantial manner, and many of them have withstood successfully the siege of the years. The dwelling-houses, on the other hand, were seldom delivered from father to son; but, as in modern Egypt, each grandee built a palace for himself, designed to last for a lifetime only, and hardly one of these mansions still exists even as a ruin.

Moreover the tombs were constructed in the dry desert or in the solid hillside, whereas the dwelling-houses were situated on the damp earth, where they had little chance of remaining undemolished. And so it is that the main part of our knowledge of the Egyptians is derived from a study of their tombs and mortuary temples. How false would be our estimate of the character of a modern nation were we to glean our information solely from its churchyard inscriptions! We should know absolutely nothing of the frivolous side of the life of those whose bare bones lie beneath the gloomy declaration of their Christian virtues. It will be realised how sincere was the light-heartedness of the Egyptians when it is remembered that almost everything in the following record of their gaieties is derived from a study of the tombs, and of objects found therein.

Light-heartedness is the key-note of the ancient philosophy of the country, and in this assertion the reader will, in most cases, find cause for surprise. The Greek travellers in Egypt, who returned to their native land impressed with the wonderful mysticism of the Egyptians, committed their amazement to paper, and so led off that feeling of awed reverence which is felt for the philosophy of Pharaoh's subjects. But in their case there was the presence of the priests and wise men eloquently to baffle them into a state of respect, and there were a thousand unwritten arguments, comments, articles of faith, and controverted points of doctrine heard from the mouths of the believers in them, to surprise them into a reverential attitude. But we of the present day have left to us only the more outward and visible remains of the Egyptians.

There are only the fundamental doctrines to work on, the more penetrating notes of the harmony to listen to. Thus the outline of the philosophy is able to be studied without any complication, and we have no whirligig of priestly talk to confuse it. Examined in this way, working only from the cold stones and dry papyri, we are confronted with the old "Eat, drink, and be merry," which is at once the happiest and most dangerous philosophy conceived by man. It is to be noticed that this way of looking at life is to be found in Egypt from the earliest times down to the period of the Greek occupation of the country, and, in fact, until the present day. That is to say, it was a philosophy inborn in the Egyptian—a part of his nature.

Imhotep, the famous philosopher of Dynasty III, about B.C.3000, said to his disciples: "Behold the dwellings of the dead. Their walls fall down, their place is no more; they are as they had never existed"; and he drew from this the lesson that man is soon done with and forgotten, and that therefore his life should be as happy as possible. To Imhotep must be attributed the earliest known exhortation to man to resign himself to his candle-end of a life, and to the inevitable snuffing-out to come, and to be merry while yet he may. There is a poem dating from about B.C.2090, from which the following is taken:—

"Walk after thy heart's desire so long as thou livest. Put myrrh on thy head, clothe thyself in fine linen, anoint thyself with the true marvels of god. . . Let not thy heart concern itself, until there cometh to thee that great day of lamentation. Yet he who is at rest can hear not thy complaint, and he who lies in the tomb can understand not thy weeping. Therefore, with smiling face, let thy days be happy, and rest not therein. For no man carrieth his goods away with him; O, no man returneth again who is gone thither."

Again we have the same sentiments expressed in a tomb of about B.C.1350, belonging to a certain Neferhotep, a priest of Amon. It is quoted elsewhere in these pages, and here we need only note the ending:

"Come, songs and music are before thee. Set behind thee all cares; think only upon gladness, until that day cometh wherein thou shalt go down to the land which loveth silence."

A Ptolemaic description quoted more fully towards the end of this chapter reads: "Follow thy desire by night and by day. Put not care within thy heart."

The ancient Egyptian peasants, like their modern descendants, were fatalists, and a happy carelessness seems to have softened the strenuousness of their daily tasks. The peasants of the present day in Egypt so lack the initiative to develop the scope of their industries that their life cannot be said to be strenuous. In whatever work they undertake, however, they show a wonderful degree of cheerfulness, and a fine disregard for misfortune. Their forefathers, similarly, went through their labours with a song upon their lips. In the tombs at Sakkâra, dating from the Old Empire, there are scenes representing flocks of goats treading in the seed on the newly-sown ground, and the inscriptions give the song which the goat-herds sing:—

"The goat-herd is in the water with the fishes,—
He speaks with the *nar*-fish, he talks with the pike;
From the west is your goat-herd; your goat-herd is from the west."

The meaning of the words is not known, of course, but the song seems to have been a popular one. A more comprehensible ditty is that sung to the oxen by their driver, which dates from the New Empire:—

"Thresh out for yourselves, ye oxen, thresh out for yourselves.
Thresh out the straw for your food, and the grain for your masters.
Do not rest yourselves, for it is cool to-day."

Some of the love-songs have been preserved from destruction, and these throw much light upon the subject of the Egyptian temperament. A number of songs, supposed to have been sung by a girl to her lover, form themselves into a collection entitled "The beautiful and gladsome songs of thy sister, whom thy heart loves, as she walks in the fields." The girl is supposed to belong to the peasant class, and most of the verses are sung while she is at her daily occupation of snaring wild duck in the marshes. One must imagine the songs warbled without

any particular refrain, just as in the case of the modern Egyptians, who pour out their ancient tales of love and adventure in a series of bird-like cadences, full-throated, and often wonderfully melodious. A peculiar sweetness and tenderness will be noted in the following examples, and, though they suffer in translation, their airy lightness and refinement is to be distinguished. One characteristic song, addressed by the girl to her lover, runs :—

" Caught by the worm, the wild-duck cries,
But in the love-light of thine eyes
I, trembling, loose the trap. So flies
The bird into the air.
What will my angry mother say ?
With basket full I come each day,
But now thy love hath led me stray,
And I have set no snare."

Again, in a somewhat similar strain, she sings :—

" The wild duck scatter far, and now
Again they light upon the bough
And cry unto their kind ;
Anon they gather on the mere—
But yet unharmed I leave them there,
For love hath filled my mind."

Another song must be given here in prose form. The girl who sings it is supposed to be making a wreath of flowers, and as she works she cries :—

" I am thy first sister, and to me thou art as a garden which I have planted with flowers and all sweet-smelling herbs. And I have directed a canal into it, that thou mightest dip thy hand into it when the north wind blows cool. The place is beautiful where we walk, because we walk together, thy hand resting in mine, our mind thoughtful and our heart joyful. It is intoxicating to me to hear thy voice, yet my life depends upon hearing it. Whenever I see thee it is better for me than food and drink."

One more song must be quoted, for it is so artless and so full of human tenderness that I may risk the accusation of straying from the main argument in repeating it. It runs :—

" The breath of thy nostrils alone
Is that which maketh my heart to live.
I found thee :
God grant thee to me
For ever and ever."

It is really painful to think of these words as having fallen from the lips of what is now a resin-smelling lump of bones and hardened flesh, perhaps still unearthed, perhaps lying in some museum show-case, or perhaps kicked about in fragments over the hot sand of some tourist-crowded necropolis. Mummies are the most lifeless objects one could well imagine. It is impossible even for those whose imaginations are the most powerful to infuse life into a thing so utterly dead as an embalmed body; and this fact is partly responsible for that atmosphere of stark melancholy sobriety and aloofness which surrounds the affairs of ancient Egypt. In reading these verses, it is imperative for their right understanding that the mummies and their resting places should be banished from the thoughts. It is not always a simple matter for the student to rid himself of the atmosphere of the museum, where the beads which should be jangling on a brown neck are lying numbered and labelled on red velvet; where the bird trap, once the centre of such feathered commotion, is propped up in a glass case as "D, 18, 432"; and where even the document in which the verses are written is the lawful booty of the grammarian and philologist in the library. But it is the first duty of an archæologist to do away with that atmosphere.

Let those who are untrammelled, then, pass out into the sunshine of the Egyptian fields and marshes, where the wild duck cry to each other as they scuttle through the tall reeds. Here in the early morning comes our songstress, and one may see her as clearly as one can that Shulamite of King Solomon's day, who has had the good fortune to belong to a land where stones and bones, being few in number, do not endanger the atmosphere of the literature. One may see her, her hair moving in the breeze "as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead"; her teeth white "as a shorn sheep which came up from the washing"; and her lips "like a thread of scarlet." Through such imaginings alone can one appreciate the songs, or realise the lightness of the manner in which they were sung.

With such a happy view of life among the upper classes as is indicated by their philosophy, and with that merry disposition amongst the peasants which shows itself in their love of song, it is not surprising to find that asceticism is practically unknown in ancient Egypt before the time of Christ. At first sight, in reflecting on the mysteries and religious ceremonies of the nation, we are apt to endow the priests and other participators with a degree of austerity wholly unjustified by the facts. We picture the priest chanting his formulæ in the dim light of the temple, the atmosphere about him heavy with incense; and we imagine him as an anchorite who has put away the things of this world. But in reality there seems to have been not even such a thing as a celibate amongst the priests. Each man had his wife and his family, his house, and his comforts of food and fine linen. He indulged in the usual pastimes and was present at the merriest of feasts. The famous wise men and magicians, such as Uba-ana of the Westcar Papyrus, had their wives, their parks, their pleasure-pavilions, and their hosts of servants. Great dignitaries of the Amon Church, such as Amenhotepsase, the Second Prophet of Amon in the time of Thutmosis IV, are represented as feasting with their friends, or driving through Thebes in richly-decorated chariots drawn by prancing horses, and attended by an array of servants. A monastic life, or the life of an anchorite, was held by the Egyptians in scorn; and indeed the state of mind which produces the monk and the hermit was almost entirely unknown to the nation in dynastic times. It was only in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods that asceticism came to be practised; and some have thought that its introduction into Egypt is to be attributed to the preachings of the Hindoo missionaries sent from India to the court of the Ptolemies. It is not really an Egyptian characteristic; and its practice did not last for more than a few centuries.

The religious teachings of the Egyptians before the Ptolemaic era do not suggest that the mortification of the flesh was a possible means of purifying the spirit. An

appeal to the senses and to the emotions, however, was considered as a legitimate method of reaching the soul. The Egyptians were passionately fond of ceremonial display. Their huge temples, painted as they were with the most brilliant colours, formed the setting of processions and ceremonies in which music, rhythmic motion, and colour were brought to a point of excellence. In honour of some of the gods dances were conducted; while celebrations, such as the fantastic Feast of Lamps, were held on the anniversaries of religious events. In these gorgeously spectacular ceremonies there was no place for anything sombre or austere, nor could they have been conceived by any but the most life-loving temperaments.

As in his religious functions, so in his home, the Egyptian regarded brilliancy and festivity as an edification. When in trouble or distress, he was wont to relieve his mind as readily by an appeal to the vanities of this world as by an invocation of the powers of Heaven. Thus, when King Sneferu, of Dynasty IV, was oppressed with the cares of state, his councillor Zazamankh constructed for him a pleasure boat which was rowed around a lake by the most beautiful damsels obtainable. And again, when Wenamon, the envoy of Herhor of Dynasty XXI, had fallen into trouble with the pirates of the Mediterranean, his depression was banished by the gift of a dancing-girl, two vessels of wine, a young goat of tender flesh, and a message which read—"Eat and drink, and let not thy heart feel apprehension."

An intense craving for brightness and cheerfulness is to be observed on all sides, and the attempt to cover every action of life with a kind of lustre is perhaps the most apparent characteristic of the race. At all times the Egyptians decked themselves with flowers, and rich and poor alike breathed what they called "the sweet north wind" through a screen of blossoms. At their feasts and festivals each guest was presented with necklaces and crowns of lotus-flowers, and a specially selected bouquet was carried in the hands. Constantly, as the hours

passed, fresh flowers were brought in to them, and the guests are shown in the tomb paintings in the act of burying their noses in the delicate petals with an air of luxury which even the conventionalities of the draughtsman cannot hide. In the woman's hair a flower was pinned which hung down before the forehead; and a cake of ointment, concocted of some sweet-smelling unguent, was so arranged upon the head that, as it slowly melted, it re-perfumed the flower. Complete wreaths of flowers were sometimes worn, and this was the custom as much in the dress of the home as in that of the feast. The common people also arrayed themselves with wreaths of lotuses at all galas and carnivals. The room in which a feast was held was decorated lavishly with flowers. Blossoms crept up the delicate pillars to the roof; garlands twined themselves around the tables and about the jars of wine; and single buds lay in every dish of food. Even the dead were decked in the tombs with a mass of flowers, as though the mourners would hide with the living delights of the earth the misery of the grave.

The Egyptian loved his garden, and filled it with all manner of beautiful flowers. Great parks were laid out by the Pharaohs, and it is recorded of Thutmosis III, that he brought back from his Asiatic campaigns vast quantities of rare plants with which to beautify Thebes. Festivals were held at the season when the flowers were in full bloom, and the light-hearted Egyptian did not fail to make the flowers talk to him, in the imagination, of the delights of life. In one case a fig tree is made to call to a passing maiden to come into its shade.

"Come," it says, "and spend this festal day, and to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow, sitting in my shadow. Let thy lover sit at thy side, and let him drink . . . Thy servants will come with the dinner things—they will bring drink of every kind, with all manner of cakes, flowers of yesterday and of to-day, and all kinds of refreshing fruit."

Than this one could hardly find a more convincing indication of the gaiety of the Egyptian temperament. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries A.D., the

people were so oppressed that any display of luxury was discouraged, and a happy smile brought the tax-collector to the door to ascertain whether it was due to financial prosperity. But the carrying of flowers, and other indications of a kind of unworried contentment, are now again becoming apparent on all sides.

The affection displayed by the Egyptians for bright colours would alone indicate that their temperament was not melancholic. The houses of the rich were painted with colours which would be regarded as crude had they appeared in the Occident, but which are admissible in Egypt, where the natural brilliancy of the sunshine and the scenery demands a more extreme colour-scheme in decoration. The pavilions in which the nobles "made a happy day," as they phrased it, were painted with the most brilliant wall-decorations, and the delicately shaped lotus columns supporting the roof were striped with half a dozen colours, and were hung with streamers of linen. The ceilings and pavements seem to have afforded the artists a happy field for a display of their originality and skill, and it is on these stretches of smooth-plastered surface that gems of Egyptian art are often found. A pavement from the palace of Akhnaton at Tell el Amarna shows a scene in which a cow is depicted frisking through the reeds, and birds are represented flying over the marshes. In the palace of Amenophis III at Gurneh there was a ceiling decoration representing a flight of doves, which, in its delicacy of execution and colouring, is not to be classed with the crude forms of Egyptian decoration, but indicates an equally light-hearted temperament in its creator. It is not probable that either bright colours or daintiness of design would emanate from the brains of a sombre-minded people.

Some of the feminine garments worn in ancient Egypt were exceedingly gaudy, and they made up in colour all that they lacked in variety of design. In the Middle and New Empires the robes of the men were as many-hued as their wall decorations, and as rich in composition. One

may take as a typical example the costume of a certain priest who lived at the end of Dynasty XVIII. An elaborate wig covers his head; a richly ornamented necklace surrounds his neck; the upper part of his body is clothed in a tunic of gauze-like linen; as a skirt there is swathed around him the most delicately coloured fine linen, one end of which is brought up and thrown gracefully over his arm; decorated sandals cover his feet and curl up over his toes; and in his hand he carries a jewelled wand surmounted by feathers. It would be an absurdity to state that these folds of fine linen hid a heart set on things higher than this world and its vanities. Nor do the objects of daily use found in the tombs suggest any austerity in the Egyptian character. There is no reflection of the Underworld to be looked for in the ornamental bronze mirrors, nor smell of death in the frail perfume pots. Religious abstraction is not to be sought in lotus-formed drinking-cups, and mortification of the body is certainly not practised on golden chairs and soft cushions. These were the objects buried in the tombs of the priests and religious teachers.

The puritanical tendency of a race can generally be discovered by a study of the personal names of the people. The names by which the Egyptians called their children are as gay as they are pretty, and lack entirely the Puritan character. "Eyes-of-love," "My-lady-is-as gold," "Cool-breeze," "Gold-and-lapis-lazuli," "Beautiful-morning," are Egyptian names very far removed from "Through-trials-and-tribulations-we-enter-into-the Kingdom-of-Heaven-Jones," which is the actual name of a modern scion of a Puritan family. And the well-known "Praise-God Barebones" has little to do with the Egyptian "Beautiful-Kitten," "Little-Wild-Lion," "I-have-wanted-you," "Sweetheart," and so on.

The nature of the folk-tales is equally indicative of the temperament of a nation. The stories which have come down to us from ancient Egypt are often as frivolous as they are quaint. Nothing delighted the Egyptians more

than listening to a tale told by an expert story-teller; and it is to be supposed that such persons were in as much demand in the old days as they are now. One may still read of the adventures of the Prince who was fated to die by a dog, a snake, or a crocodile; of the magician who made the waters of the lake heap themselves up that he might descend to the bottom dry-shod to recover a lady's jewel; of the fat old wizard who would cut a man's head off and join it again to his body; of the fairy godmothers who made presents to a new-born babe; of the ship-wrecked sailor who was thrown up on an island inhabited by a serpent with a human nature; of the princess in the tower whose lovers spent their days in attempting to climb to her window—and so on. The stories have no moral, they are not pompous: they are purely amusing, interesting and romantic. As an example one may quote the story which is told of Prince Setna, the son of Rameses II. This Prince was one day sitting in the court of the temple of Ptah, when he saw a woman pass, "beautiful exceedingly, there being no woman of her beauty." There were wonderful golden ornaments upon her, and she was attended by fifty-two persons, themselves of some rank and much beauty. "The hour that Setna saw her, he knew not the place on earth where he was"; and he called to his servants and told them to "go quickly to the place where she is, and learn what comes under her command." The beautiful lady proved finally to be named Tabubna, the daughter of a priest of Bast, the Cat. Setna's acquaintance with her was later of a most disgraceful character; and, from motives which are not clear, she made him murder his own children to please her. At the critical moment, however, when the climax is reached, the old, old joke is played upon the listener, who is told that Setna then woke up, and discovered that the whole affair had been an afternoon dream in the shade of the temple court.

The Egyptians often amused themselves by drawing comic pictures and caricatures, and there is an interesting series still preserved in which animals take the place of

human beings, and are shown performing all manner of antics. One sees a cat walking on its hind legs driving a flock of geese, while a wolf carrying a staff and knapsack leads a herd of goats. There is a battle of the mice and cats, and the king of the mice in his chariot drawn by two dogs, is seen attacking the fortress of the cats. A picture which is worthy of Edward Lear shows a ridiculous hippopotamus seated amidst the foliage of a tree, eating from a table, whilst a crow mounts a ladder to wait upon him. There are caricatures showing women of fashion rouging their faces, unshaven and really amusing old tramps, and so forth. Even upon the walls of the tombs there are often comic pictures, in which one may see little girls fighting and tearing each other's hair, men tumbling one over another as they play, and the like; and one must suppose that these were the scenes which the owner of the tomb wished to perpetuate throughout the eternity of Death.

The Egyptians took keen delight in music. In the sound of the trumpet and on the well-tuned cymbals they praised God in Egypt as merrily as the Psalmist could wish. The strings and the pipe, the lute and the harp, made music at every festival—religious, national, or private. Plato tells us that "nothing but beautiful forms and fine music was permitted to enter into the assemblies of young people" in Egypt; and he states that music was considered as being of the greatest consequence for its beneficial effects upon youthful minds. Strabo records the fact that music was largely taught in Egypt, and the numbers of musical instruments buried in the tombs or represented in the decorations confirm his statement. The music was scientifically taught and a knowledge of harmony is apparent in the complicated forms of the instruments. The harps sometimes had as many as twenty-two strings; the long-handled guitars, fitted with three strings, were capable of wide gradations; and the flutes were sufficiently complicated to be described by early writers as "many-toned." The Egyptian did not

merely bang a drum with his fist because it made a noise, nor blow blasts upon a trumpet as a means of expressing the inexpressible. He was an educated musician, and he employed the medium of music to encourage his lightness of heart and to render his gaiety more gay.

One sees representations of the women in a rich man's harîm amusing themselves by dancing and singing. In the tomb of Ay there is a scene showing the interior of the women's quarters, and here the ladies are shown dancing, playing guitars, feasting or adorning themselves with their jewellery; while the store-rooms are seen to be filled with all manner of musical instruments, as well as mirrors, boxes of clothes, and articles of feminine use. At feasts and banquets a string band played during the meal, and songs were sung to the accompaniment of the harp. At religious festivals choruses of male and female voices were introduced. Soldiers marched through the streets to the sound of trumpets and drums, and marriage processions and the like were led by a band. At the feasts it was customary for all the dancing girls, who were employed for the amusement of the guests, to perform their dances and to play a guitar or a flute at the same time. One sees representations of girls, their heads thrown back and their long hair flying, merrily twanging a guitar as they skip round the room. In the civil and religious processions many of the participators danced along as though from sheer lightness of heart; and on some occasions even the band footed it down the high-road, circling, jumping, and skipping as they played.

The words for "rejoice" and "dance" were synonymous in the literature of the Egyptians. In early days dancing naturally implied rejoicing, and rejoicing was most easily expressed by dancing. But the Egyptians of the refined periods more often danced to amuse themselves, regarding it, just as we do at the present day, as an exhilaration. Persons of the upper classes, however, did not indulge very freely in it, but preferred to watch the performances of professional dancers. At all

banquets dancing was as indispensable as wine, women and song, and it rather depended on the nature of the wine and women as to whether the guests joined personally in the sport or sat still while the dancers swayed around the room. The professionals were generally women, but sometimes men were employed, and one sees representations of a man performing some difficult solo while a chorus of women sings and marks time by clapping the hands. Men and women danced together on occasions, but as a general rule the Egyptian preferred to watch the movements of the more graceful sex by themselves. The women sometimes danced naked, to show off the grace of their poses and the suppleness of their muscles; sometimes they were decked with ribbons only; and sometimes they wore transparent dresses made of linen of the finest texture. It was not unusual for them to carry tambourines and castanets with which to beat time to their dances. On the other hand, there were delicate and sober performances, unaccompanied by music. The paintings show some of the poses to have been exceedingly graceful, and there were character dances enacted in which the figures must have been highly dramatic and artistic. For example, the tableau which occurs in one dance, and is called "The Wind," shows two of the dancing-girls bent back like reeds when the wind blows upon them, while a third figure stands over them in protection, as though symbolising the immovable rocks.

But more usually the merry mood of the Egyptian asserted itself, as it so often does at the present day, in a demand for something approaching nearer to buffoonery. The dancers whirled one another about in the wildest manner, often tumbling head over heels on the floor. A trick, attended apparently with success, consisted in the attempt by the dancers to balance the body upon the head without the support of the arms. This buffoonery was highly appreciated by the audience which witnessed it; and the banqueting-room must have been full of the noise

of riotous mirth. One cannot, indeed, regard a feast as pompous or solemn at which the banging of the tambourines and the click of castanets vied with the clatter of the dishes and the laughter of the guests in creating a general hullabaloo. Let those state who will that the Egyptian was a gloomy individual, but first let them not fail to observe that same Egyptian trying to stand upon his head amidst the roars of laughter of his friends.

Dancing as a religious ceremony is to be found in many primitive countries, and in Egypt it exists at the present day in more than one form. In the days of the Pharaohs it was customary to institute dances in honour of some of the gods, more especially those deities whose concerns were earthly—that is to say, those connected with love, joy, birth, death, fertility, reproduction, and so on. It will be remembered how David danced before the ark of the Lord, and how his ancestors danced in honour of the golden calf. In Egypt the king was wont to dance before the great god Min of the crops, and at harvest-time the peasants performed their thanksgiving before the figures of Min in this manner. Hathor and Bast, the two great goddesses of pleasure, were worshipped in the dance. Hathor was mistress of sports and dancing, and patron of amusements and mirth, joy and pleasure, beauty and love; and in regard to the happy temperament of the Egyptians, it is significant that this goddess was held in the highest esteem throughout the history of the nation.

Bast was honoured by a festival which for merriment and frivolity could not well be equalled. The festival took place at Bubastis, and is described by Herodotus in the following words :—

" This is the nature of the ceremony on the way to Bubastis. They go by water, and numerous boats are crowded with persons of both sexes. During the voyage several women strike the cymbals, some men play the flute, the rest singing and clapping their hands. As they pass near a town they bring the boat close to the bank. Some of the women continue to sing and play the cymbals; others cry out as long as they can, and utter mocking jests against the people of the town, who begin to dance, while the former pull up their clothes before them in a scoffing manner.

The same is repeated at every town they pass on the river. Arrived at Bubastis, they celebrate the festival of Bast, sacrificing a great number of victims, and on that occasion a greater consumption of wine takes place than during the whole of the year."

At this festival of Bast half the persons taking part in the celebrations must have become intoxicated. The Egyptians were always given to wine-drinking, and Athenaeus goes so far as to say that they were a nation addicted to systematic intemperance. The same writer on the authority of Hellanicus, states that the vine was cultivated in the Nile Valley at a date earlier than that at which it was first grown by any other people ; and it is to this circumstance that Dion attributes the Egyptian's love of wine. Strabo and other writers speak of the wines of Egypt as being particularly good, and various kinds emanating from different localities are mentioned. The wines made from grapes were of the red and white varieties ; but there were also fruit wines, made from pomegranates and other fruits. In the list of offerings inscribed on the walls of temples and tombs one sees a large number or varieties recorded—wines from the north, wines from the south, wines provincial, and wines foreign. Beer, made of barley, was also drunk very largely, and this beverage is heartily commended by the early writers. Indeed, the wine and beer-bibber was so common an offender against the dignity of the nation, that every moralist who arose had a word to say against him. Thus, for example, in the maxims of Ani one finds the moralist writing :—

" Do not put thyself in a beer-house. An evil thing are words reported as coming from thy mouth when thou dost not know that they have been said by thee. When thou fallest thy limbs are broken, and nobody givest thee a hand. Thy comrades in drink stand up, saying ' Away with this drunken man '."

The less thoughtful members of society, however, considered drunkennsss as a very good joke, and even went so far as to portray it in their tomb decorations. One seees men carried home from the feast across the shoulders of three of their companions, or ignominiously hauled out

of the house by their ankles and the scruff of their neck. In the tomb of Paheri at El Kab women are represented at a feast, and scraps of their conversation are recorded, such, for instance, as " Give me eighteen cups of wine, for I should love to drink to drunkenness : my inside is as dry as straw." There are actually representations of women overcome with nausea through immoderate drinking, and being attended by servants who have hastened with basins to their assistance. In another tomb-painting, a drunken man is seen to have fallen against one of the delicate pillars of the pavilion with such force that it has toppled over, to the dismay of the guests around.

In the light of such scenes as these one may picture the life of an Egyptian in the elder days as being not a little depraved. One sees the men in their gaudy raiment, and the women luxuriously clothed, staining their garments with the wine spilt from the drinking bowls as their hands shake with their drunken laughter ; and the vision of Egyptian solemnity is still further banished at the sight. It is only too obvious that a land of laughter and jest, feasting and carouse, must be situated too near a Pompeian volcano to be capable of endurance and the inhabitants too purposeless in their movements to avoid at some time or other running into the paths of burning lava. The people of Egypt went merrily through the radiant valley in which they lived, employing all that the gods had given them—not only the green palms, the thousand birds, the blue sky, the hearty wind, the river and its reflections, but also the luxuries of their civilisation —to make for themselves a frail feast of happiness. And when the last flowers, the latest empty drinking-cup, fell to the ground, nothing remained to them but that sodden, drunken night of disgrace which so shocks one at the end of dynastic history, and which inevitably led to the fall of the nation. Christian asceticism came as the natural reaction and Mohammedan strictness followed in due course ; and it required the force of both these movements to put strength and health into the people once more.

One need not dwell, however, on this aspect of the Egyptian temperament. It is more pleasing, and as pertinent to the argument, to follow the old lords of the Nile into the sunshine once more, and to glance for a moment at their sports. Hunting was a pleasure to them, in which they indulged at every opportunity. One sees representations of this with great frequency upon the walls of the tombs. A man will be shown standing in a reed boat which has been pushed in amongst the waving papyrus. A boomerang is in his hand, and his wife by his side helps him to locate the wild duck, so that he may penetrate within throwing-distance of the birds before they rise. Presently up they go with a whir, and the boomerang claims its victims; while all manner of smaller birds dart amidst the reeds, and gaudy butterflies pass startled overhead. Again one sees the hunter galloping in his chariot over the hard sand of the desert, shooting his arrows at the gazelle as he goes. Or yet again with his dogs he is shown in pursuit of the long-eared Egyptian hare, or of some other creature of the desert. When not thus engaged he may be seen excitedly watching a bull-fight, or eagerly judging the merits of rival wrestlers, boxers, and fencers. One may follow him later into the seclusion of his garden, where, surrounded by a wealth of trees and flowers, he plays draughts with his friends, romps with his children, or fishes in his artificial pond.

There is much evidence of this nature to show that the Egyptian was as much given to these healthy amusements as he was to the mirth of the feast. Josephus states that the Egyptians were a people addicted to pleasure, and the evidence brought together in the foregoing pages shows that his statement is to be confirmed. In sincere joy of living they surpassed any other nation of the ancient world. Life was a thing of such delight to the Egyptian, that he shrank equally from losing it himself and from taking it from another. His prayer was that he might live to be a centenarian. In spite of the many wars of the Egyptians, there was less unnecessary bloodshed in the

Nile Valley than in any other country which called itself civilised. Death was as terrible to them as it was inevitable, and the constant advice of the thinker was that the living should make the most of their life. When a king died, it was said that "he went forth to heaven having spent life in happiness," or that "he rested after life, having completed his years in happiness." It is true that the Egyptians wished to picture the after-life as one of continuous joy. One sees representations of a man's soul seated in the shade of the fruit-trees of the Underworld, while birds sing in the branches above him, and a lake of cool water lies before him; but they seemed to know that this was too pleasant a picture to be a real one. A woman, the wife of the high priest, left upon her tombstone the following inscription, addressed to her husband:

"O, brother, husband, friend," she says, "thy desire to drink and to eat has not ceased. Therefore be drunken, enjoy the love of women—make holiday. Follow thy desire by night and by day. Put not care within thy heart. Lo! are not these the years of thy life upon earth? For as for the Underworld, it is a land of slumber and heavy darkness, a resting-place for those who have passed within. Each sleepeth there in his own room, they never awake to see their fellows, they behold not their fathers nor their mothers, their heart is careless of their wives and children."

She knows that she will be too deeply steeped in the stupor of the Underworld to remember her husband, and unselfishly she urges him to continue to be happy after the manner of his nation. Then, in a passage which rings down the years in its terrible beauty, she tells of her utter despair, lying in the gloomy Underworld, suffocated with the mummy bandages, and craving for the light, the laughter, and the coolness of the day.

"The water of life," she cries "with which every mouth is moistened, is corruption to me, the water that is by me corrupteth me. I know not what to do since I came into this valley. Give me running water; say to me, 'Water shall not cease to be brought to thee'. Turn my face to the north wind upon the edge of the water. Verily thus shall my heart be cooled and refreshed from its pain."

It is, however, the glory of life, rather than the horror of death which is the dominant note in the inscription and reliefs. The scenes in the tomb decorations seem to cry out for very joy. The artist has imprisoned in his representations as much sheer happiness as was ever infused into cold stone. One sees there the gazelle leaping over the hills as the sun rises, the birds flapping their wings and singing, the wild duck rising from the marshes, and the butterflies flashing overhead. The fundamental joy of living—the gaiety of life which the human being may feel in common with the animals—is shown in these scenes as clearly as is the merriment in the representations of feasts and dancing. In these paintings and reliefs one finds an exact illustration to the joyful exhortation of the Psalmist as he cries, " Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; . . . let the fields be joyful, and all that is therein." In a land where, to quote one of their own poems, " the tanks are full of water and the earth overflows with love," where " the cool north wind " blows merrily over the fields, and the sun never ceases to shine, it would be a remarkable phenomenon if the ancient Egyptians had not developed the sanguine temperament. The foregoing pages have shown them at their feasts, in their daily occupations, and in their sports, and the reader will find that it is not difficult to describe them, in the borrowed words of the old geographer, as a people always gay and never-ceasingly " fond of dancing and red wine."