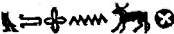



MEYDOUM.

By the Rev. W. J. LOFTIE.

Two hours' journey by rail to Wasta and one hour and a quarter's ride on donkeys from the station are required to visit this pyramid from Cairo. The returning train is due at four, but is often late, and we were kept no less than four hours waiting for it.

The morning ride across the harvest fields skirting the village was very pleasant. The pyramid was full in sight during a great part of the way, and looked so high, so strange, so fresh, that we kept constantly repeating "It is most imposing, more so than Gizeh, more so than Sakkara." The village, or town rather, of Meydoun is about a mile from the pyramid by the bridle path, but not more than half-a-mile as the crow flies. It appears to have been built on an ancient mound, part of which showed red bricks, but whether burnt bricks or bricks reddened by an accidental fire I could not tell.

Meydoun, as a town, has an interest apart from anything now to be found in it. The name is certainly the oldest local name now surviving in the world. This used to be said of Damascus, and I think also of Hebron. But Meydoun is mentioned on monuments of the third dynasty. It may, therefore, if we accept M. Mariette's chronology, date from before the middle of the fifth millenium B.C. Abraham flourished according to all accounts in the third. The name is given in two ways by the authorities. In Baedeker (edited by Ebers) it is  "Meytun of the oxen." This name is written in the tomb of Nefermat, described below. But M. Mariette, in the great book of photographs at Boulak, writes it , the first syllable of which may be Meri, and the name would seem to signify "Beloved of Tum."

Tum was the sun-god worshipped at Heliopolis. This would make the name Maytoun, rather than Meytun.

The pyramid is approached from the south along a slope of sand studded with dark green bushes. Here and there a patch of darker green appears, as if there had once been a series of ponds or lakes, and near one of them is a mound which seems to mark the site of a building, perhaps a temple. The pyramid is in three stages, the first 69 ft. high, the second 21 ft., and third, much ruined, from 10 to 15 ft. The total height is therefore less than 100 ft., but it appears far more from the situation of the mound on which it stands. This is a high hill of disintegrated white limestone, which may conceal a rock. Its surface is covered with great blocks, some of them well squared and chiselled, others rough, as if broken. The southern face of the pyramid is very rich in colour. It is like a slice of double Gloucester cheese, quite shiny in places, and of very smooth masonry. The other sides are hardly so perfect, and on the north is a hole cut into the face about forty feet above the top of the mound, about ten feet square, but only showing the inner masonry to be perfect and regular. The mound below on the same side has the traces of a recent cutting, now filled with sand, made, I presume, by M. Mariette, or some other explorer, with a view to gaining an entrance, an object not yet attained; its entrance is not known and has hitherto eluded investigation, but it is probably not far from the cutting. M. Mariette says it should be compared with the Mastabat el Faroon, as well as with the pyramid of Rigga, a little to the north. It seems to be a great mastaba surmounted by two smaller ones, and is, therefore, neither a mastaba, as usually found, nor yet a pyramid. The Arabs always call it the "Haram el Kadab," or False Pyramid, asserting that it is only a rock cased with masonry, and has no interior chamber. This is incredible, and a rich "find" may be expected when M. Mariette penetrates to a royal tomb.

There is every reason to believe that this strange building is the monument and still contains the body of a king who is variously described as the last of the third dynasty and the first of the fourth. In any case Sneferoo was a predecessor of Shoofoo, and his pyramid is older


than the oldest at Ghizeh. The name of Sneferoo is thus written in the tomb of Nefermat. I looked at this monogram with a feeling akin to awe. It is unquestionably the oldest written name of a king in the world, yet it is easily decipherable, and shows that already the Egyptians were accustomed to the use of letters, and distinguished the names of their sovereigns by a cartouche.








About 300 yards north of the pyramid across a hot slope of sand, we reached the first of a series of mounds containing tombs which have been opened and examined, and, I am sorry to add, almost entirely defaced. It would appear that the pyramid occupies the only rock, for these tombs are formed of crude brick, and only the sand and stony accumulations heaped over them from the surrounding desert hide their form which must have been that of a long, low, flat-topped building of rectangular plan, covered on its sloping faces with white stucco, and having several entrances and small porches, and other auxiliary structures along the eastern face. It would almost seem as if when all was finished and the body of the deceased duly deposited in its last resting place, among the rural and home scenes prepared in his life time, that the sand and stones were purposely heaped over it, and the beautiful carving, the great square stones from the quarry of Toora, the statues and the painting concealed from view under an artificial hillock. Another hillock stands a little further north east.

The first tomb we come to is that of Nefermat. He was a functionary of the court of Sneferoo. His name is clearly written above the door on the circular crossbeam with which, in imitation of the lintel and side posts of a wooden doorway, the entrance is furnished. This circular door head, which occurs almost always in tombs of the ancient empire, and is often copied in granite as well as in limestone, may have been a roller on which to suspend a curtain. The name of Nefermat is thus spelled : He is described as "Suten ra," or cousin of the king, a title very frequent under the old monarchy, and no doubt representing the fashion by which noblemen in England have since the reign of Henry IV been ad-



dressed as "cousins" of the sovereign. It is written in this tomb , but the form is often varied.

Nefermat is represented with his wife Atet clasping his knees. Her name is given in hieroglyphs:— Behind her on the right of the short entrance passage a procession of women is represented, bringing offerings from the estates of the deceased. Each of these estates is distinguished by its proper name, with the determinative . Among them is the name of the neighbouring city of Meydoun. One of the names has the figure of a swine as part of its determinative, but though it is fully described in Baedeker, I was unable to find it. The sand is much heaped up within the passage, and has probably covered it. To the left of the doorway stand, one above the other, the three sons of the deceased. Their names are much defaced, but, so far as I could make them out, the eldest was . The second was . The third, a child with his finger in his mouth, was

 These figures were incised on the stone and the hollows filled with a kind of enamel, most of which has been picked out by mischievous visitors. Here and there a portion remains, which from the brilliancy and beauty of the effect makes us long for more. The red, with which the men are coloured, is very hard, and has resisted the hands of marauders better than the yellow colour of the women. There are also sculptures in low relief, as in the better known tomb of Tai at Sakkara. Above the portrait of Nefermat himself are representations of his possessions, each with a number attached, among other things his falcons, which are on perches, four in a row, the numerals below being 〇, IIII, III, II, I. Perhaps this indicates 400 of the first kind, 300 of the second, and so on; but, though this is the earliest example of Egyptian numerals, and much older than the so-called "Tomb of Numbers" at Ghizeh, I have seen no account of it in the books to which I have had access.

About twenty yards north, but in the same rectangular mound, is the tomb of Nefermat's wife, Atet. The building has been much defaced, but enough remains to make it very interesting. She evidently survived her hus-





band, and seems to have succeeded him in his possessions. She is represented at the door in an act of adoration before the statue of Nefermat, and on the outer face, above the entrance, she is seated with her feet under her, in the modern Egyptian fashion, on a platform or high stool, while three fowlers bring her wild geese, carrying them by the necks, and she takes one in her hand. Exactly over the door a hexagonal net encloses a flock of the same birds, and on the left a fowler is in the act of drawing it over them. It was from this tomb that the marvellously lifelike picture of a flock of geese pasturing was taken which is now in the museum at Boulak.

Some thirty yards further, and a little more to the east is another mound, also of sand and flints, covering a core of crude brick. It contains two double tombs, both faced with masonry.

The first is that of Chent and Mara his wife. Chent, like Nefermat, was a functionary under Sneferoo, and a "trusty cousin and councillor." It is much defaced and contains little of interest.





The second tomb is almost altogether gone. It was about twenty yards further north, and apparently consisted, like the rest, of an entrance porch of carved stone, and a passage leading to interior chambers, ornamented with frescoed stucco and bas-reliefs of stone. Though so entirely dilapidated, this tomb is of the highest interest. It contained the statues of Ra-hotep and Nefert, which now form the greatest treasures of the museum of Boulak.

Ra-hotep appears to have been the son of Sneferoo, and to have died before his father, while still young. His wife, the beautiful Nefert, seems to have died about the same time, and both were buried in the same tomb. It is possible that their deaths may have left Sneferoo childless, and so led to the extinction of the third dynasty. Rahotep is represented a little less than life size, his sitting statue being four feet high, his left hand resting on his knee as if to support a wand or rod; his right hand raised as if in the act of giving an order. He is painted of a dark red brown, and wears only a white kilt or waist cloth, and a plain necklace. His eyes are of crystal, and startling by their look of life. His head is shaved, he

has no beard, and his whole appearance is that of a very young and rather plain, but not ignoble looking man. He is seated on a white stone seat or chair, on which, at either side of his head, are his name and titles. To his right the inscription commences with the formula Suten-se, the King's son; below this is his name  which occurs again with the same formulas at the other side:  Ra, followed by the table of offerings  hotep, and the letters  tp. His name therefore would seem to have been very much the same as the Greek, Theodotus. He is next described as a general of infantry—this is on his right, and on the left as a steward of the royal estates.

The statue of Nefert is carved in the same proportions, being slightly smaller than life. She is seated like her husband, and wears a white tight fitting and exceedingly graceful garment, slightly open in front at the throat; it only rises to the points of her shoulders, and leaves space for the display of an inner garment of which only the sleeves or suspenders are visible. She has no shoes, but her dress reaches to her ancles. Round her neck, she wears a necklace of six circles of green and red enamel from which a row of emeralds and rubies depended. On her head is an elaborately plaited "wig," but possibly her own hair is intended to be represented, and round her forehead is a ribbon or "snood," ornamented with roses and leaves, perhaps meant for embroidery.

Her face is exceedingly lifelike, and judged even by a modern or a classical standard remarkably lovely. Her mouth is full, but not too full, an incipient pout being changed almost into a smile. Its sweetness of expression baffles description. Her eye brows and eye lashes are black and rather heavy, but they are lighted up by a clear gray eye in which a merry twinkle seems to contend with depth of feeling almost amounting to sadness. In short, it is impossible not to feel, that in spite of rude workmanship in places, in spite of a somewhat coarse system of colour, in spite of the disguises which the tyranny of fashion, even in that remote age as now, loves to impose on natural beauty, you stand in the presence of a great original work, by the hand of a master devoted to his art. Although this is the earliest effort of portrait

sculpture known to exist, it yields to no other statue of the kind which I have ever seen in either of the two great qualities of portraiture, life-likeness and expression. The artist who made the figure of Queen Eleanor in Westminster Abbey could not have surpassed it in beauty, while for expression it is worthy of the school of Michael Angelo. Above her head at either side is an inscription; it tells us that she was named Nefert, and that she belonged to the king's family. Following the inscription is the determinative figure of a woman. The hieroglyphs are a good example of the simple yet effective style of writing under the old empire:—First comes the formula,  then follows the name  Nefer-t, a nefer or  guitar being placed alongside the n, f, r, as if to show the sound. Below is the determinative, . The word "nefer," sometimes rendered "nofre," is common in ancient Egyptian names. It is symbolised by a musical instrument shaped like a heart with a long neck and two cross pieces. The meaning seems to be as nearly as possible our word "gracious," but is sometimes translated "beautiful," and sometimes "good." That the lady represented in this wonderful statue was as good as she was beautiful, every admirer of the work would fain believe, but except her name and rank we know little about her. It is not quite certain that her companion in the tomb was her husband. Her date, even, is involved in obscurity, for the reign of Sneferoo, like the reigns of all the kings of Egypt before the eighteenth dynasty, is matter of controversy, and is variously estimated by the learned men who have written on chronology. According to M. Mariette, who adheres simply to the lists of Maneths, the fourth dynasty began in 1235, and until we have better information, we are safe, I cannot but think, in accepting his views as offering us a good working theory if nothing more. The Chronological Table in Baedeker makes Sneferoo the first monarch of the fourth dynasty, thus following the arrangement of Lepsius, who gives B. C. 3122 as his probable date.

The two statues are made in fine limestone, probably quarried in the Mokattam range at Toora. The colour is flat, and the surfaces unpolished. They are both as fresh

and bright as they can ever have been. Considered as the oldest pieces of portrait sculpture in existence, the oldest statues, indeed, of any kind, they betray an absence of conventionality, a simple adherence to nature which may be sought in vain in the numerous works of later Egyptian art.

There is another mound immediately north-east of that on which the pyramid stands. It does not appear to have been disturbed, and may hereafter yield treasures equally interesting to the excavator. The pyramid of Meydoun, I may mention, in concluding this imperfect note, is situated considerably to the south of the nearest pyramid on the Sakkara platform, and out of sight of any other. It is built at the edge of a low line of sandy hills, close to the cultivated land, and has not the advantage enjoyed by the pyramids at Ghizeh and others, of standing on a conspicuous eminence ; nevertheless, being without rivals in sight, it is visible for a long distance to the voyager on the Nile, although, so far as I am aware, it has hitherto been wholly neglected by the ordinary tourist. It is not more than five miles from the edge of the river, and could easily be reached from a dahabieh, even on foot in cool weather. I found it however rather too much for a single day's excursion from Cairo, as the trains do not answer except for visitors willing to undertake the ride from Wasta in the midday heat. My visit was made in April, 1878.