



Egyptian Ideas Of The Future Life (Illustrated)

Budge E. A. Wallis

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THE following pages are intended to place before the reader in a handy form an account of the principal ideas and beliefs held by the ancient Egyptians concerning the resurrection and the future life, which is derived wholly from native religious works. The literature of Egypt which deals with these subjects is large and, as was to be expected, the product of different periods which, taken together, cover several thousands of years; and it is exceedingly difficult at times to reconcile the statements and beliefs of a writer of one period with those of a writer of another. Up to the present no systematic account of the doctrine of the resurrection and of the future life has been discovered, and there is no reason for hoping that such a thing will ever be found, for the Egyptians do not appear to have thought that it was necessary to write a work of the kind. The inherent difficulty of the subject, and the natural impossibility that different men living in different places and at different times should think alike on matters which must, after all, belong always to the region of faith, render it more than probable that no college of priests, however powerful, was able to formulate a system of beliefs which would be received throughout Egypt by the clergy and the laity alike, and would be copied by the scribes as a final and authoritative work on Egyptian eschatology. Besides this, the genius and structure of the Egyptian language are such as to preclude the possibility of composing in it works of a philosophical or metaphysical character in the true sense of the words. In spite of these difficulties, however, it is possible to collect a great deal of important information on the subject from the funereal and religious works which have come down to us, especially concerning the great central idea of immortality, which existed unchanged for thousands of years, and formed the pivot upon which the religious and social life of the ancient Egyptians actually turned. From the beginning to the end of his life the Egyptian's chief thought was of the life beyond the grave, and the hewing of his tomb in the rock, and the providing of its furniture, every detail of which was prescribed by the custom of the country, absorbed the best thoughts of his mind and a large share of his worldly goods, and kept him ever mindful of the time when his mummified body, would be borne to his "everlasting house" in the limestone plateau or bill.

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