









CHAPTER IV.

THE INSCRIPTIONS.

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31. In the plates to this volume Professor Petrie has far more than doubled the materials available for studying the earliest known period of writing in Egypt; they now afford us a considerable insight into the condition of that art at and about the time of the 1st Dynasty. Egyptian writing developed rapidly during the Old Kingdom; the beginning of the IVth Dynasty was especially a period of rapid improvement, and it has long been recognised that the graffiti of Khufu are written with considerable freedom. It is, however, somewhat startling to find cursive writing in the time of the 1st Dynasty. Some of the scratched signs on vases in these plates are very much abbreviated, but it is the ink-writing which here, as elsewhere at all periods, displays the most remarkable development. Nos. 3, 4, 5 on Pl. x. show "linear hieroglyphs" scarcely distinguishable from those of much later periods: more particularly is this the case with the  in No. 5; and the form of the accounts in Pl. xix., No. 11, is not less striking.

Another fact which it is interesting to observe is that, with one exception, all the essential features of the Egyptian system of writing appear well developed at this remote period. The rapid change from the inscriptions at the end of the IIIrd Dynasty to those of the IVth Dynasty would have prepared us to find some radical difference in the writing of the 1st Dynasty. But apparently no such difference exists in fact; at present, indeed, we find no clear evidence of the employment of determinative signs in these primitive writings, but even

as late as the Vth Dynasty their use was very restricted in the monumental writing, though it was common in the cursive, and in the freely written texts of the Pyramids. As more specimens of cursive writing come to light of this very early period, we may expect to ascertain with certainty that the use of determinatives had already begun. Though  and  are probably to be read in most cases as word-signs for *zt*, *ht*, most of the alphabetic signs are already in full use as simple phonograms, and their employment as "phonetic complements" is likewise well established. Thus  constantly accompanies , e.g. in  ix. 2, to distinguish its value as *stu* from its other value, *sw*; and the same sign stands separately for the feminine ending of  *byt*, "bee," in  *by-ty*, "King of Lower Egypt," lit. "He that belongs to the Bee," or perhaps "the Bee-keeper." But though the system was developed, it must not be supposed that writing was as easy then as it was in the time of the XIIth Dynasty and later. The full and more or less fixed spelling of later writing provided so many checks to the reading that a practised scribe need seldom mistake the meaning of a passage, even when taken at random. In the early part of the Old Kingdom this was not so, and under the 1st Dynasty it would seem that one sign to a word was the usual allowance. The reading, therefore, depended on the exact recognition of each individual sign. When the characters were carefully made the scribe would generally recognise the meaning from them