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**DFG-Projekt "Digitalisierung und Erschließung des Nachlasses des
Ägyptologen Adolf Erman (1854-1937)"**

Brief von Norman de Garis Davies an Adolf Erman

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Kuona Lussor.
Dec. 13/95.

Dear Patriarch,

This is a season at which one should write to those friends whom one has not had occasion to write to for some time. The days of letter writing, as of so many other good institutions, seems gone, and letters are no longer a way of paying visits but only of asking subscriptions or conducting business. But when one is under such obligations to you by reason of your brave continuance in this world, when so many others are in a hurry to leave it for the fields of Idah (where, presumably, you will be able to sow a few notes and reap a book) then one ought to repay you at least with an encouraging line or two.

As you see, instead of having the sense to stay at home and read the "Times" and wait for the wonders of the snow on the fir trees and the bulbs flowering in the grass as a promise of the spring, I am still cherishing the delusion that Egypt cannot get on without me and that the tents of the Thebaid will fall into ruin if I don't keep an eye on them. However this year we did seriously discuss whether it was worth while journeying all this way and leaving our snug little house and our three acres of lawn & flower beds and orchard and wood, when there was so much to do in the way of launching books. But I am so tired of book-

making that I was afraid I should do very little at home,
whereas out here these poor texts & pictures cry out for
the copyist and, as there is no other form of pleasure
available, one is obliged to set to work to pass the time
away.

So I am again at the tiring job to which I do seem to
have confined me of trying to rescue what Time and the
fellah have been trying, just as assiduously and over
a much longer period, to destroy. The miserable truth
of the vizier's use holds me at present with its long texts
in a terrible state of injury and decay. This morning
I had to do my work under nerve-racking conditions
as an old lady had been miserably enough to
die during the night and the courtyard was full of
men who shouted one sentence without stopping for an
hour at least, with no more sense in it than the
Ancient "O my father, O my father!" or "To the West, to
the West!" Then there were scores of women, black beads
of rags, who for hours crowned a musical wail, typical
of all the sorrows of mankind. It is strange that for
them death should be the only event that moves them
to real feeling & lament. One would have thought it to be
the happiest event of all in their miserable lives
spent in pain & toil & dirt, not "lower than the ants"
but lower than the animals whose lairs they share.
It seems to me that if one was guided by evidence one
would believe in Revelation rather than Evolution
and Reason - the God who taught men to sow & reap, the
foster who taught women to weave; for I cannot
conceive either the bounty of nature or the hard struggle
for existence ever teaching these people anything

whatsoever.

You & I will soon be of the same age & I expect we are both feeling the penalty of age in seeing our companions dropping away one by one and young souls trying to take their place in whom it is difficult to have confidence or understanding. You will have felt Breasted's loss I am sure. I had hoped to see him in Cairo but he left ten days or so before I arrived. Nelson tells me that he had not known him so bright or in such excellent health & spirit for a long time. He left Egypt perfectly well; yet, ten days later, he landed in America a dying man. It is a great loss to us all as it remains to be seen if the Oriental Institute which has no other man at all comparable to him will be able to obtain Rockefeller's interest & support. And ~~how~~ ^{how} without the Institute, is ~~the~~ excavation in the Orient going to be carried on. It would take very little occasion in Egypt to bring all excavation at least to an end and with it all further enrichment of Museums. Breasted had an optimism which had an infectious quality and which is not conspicuous in any one else I know at the present time. The world does not want to know that civilization did not begin with the Renaissance (at ~~least~~ earliest). Civilization for the present age is Speed & Dynamics and an art that is worthy of this conception. Well, something that resembles sufficiency will the old order of things will last our time I suppose and Mesopotamia has proved that deluges don't destroy everything.

It is too bad to catch pessimistically - at any rate for an Englishman whose land is still beautiful & remarkably prosperous and is assured of a sane & strong government for another four or five years. It was a happy wave of farewell from England - that news of the Conservative victory. I am afraid we are rather pleased with ourselves just now and it is just as well that Stutz has shown us that the Millennium is not so vastly much nearer than it was in B.C. 30. Physical evolution is a slow thing and social evolution seems to be slower. But even a long life like yours may cover about one ebb & flow of the tide or not nearly so much as a mile.

With your eyes so hopeful you must do a lot of thinking, and it urges me to think that you are so optimistic & humanistic by nature, not in the weak & short-sighted way but with the old liberalism now so much out of fashion. And perhaps it was much too complacent, and underestimated the enemy forces. I am sure you will feel that Germany at any rate is on a retrograde wave just now & you will want to live to see the tide come back stronger & clearer, or the signs of its return at any rate.

I should love to come to Berlin and see you again but I have little hope of it. I have so much to do before my eyes fail and I do not get to love trains & packing and prefer the countryside to any city. I rarely even go in to Berlin though my car takes me in in ten minutes! Warm regards from my wife & myself to Frau Emma & yourself and all best wishes for a pleasant Christmas season. Yours ever W. de S. Davies