



The Instruction of Ptah-Hotep and the Instruction of Ke'Gemni The Oldest Books in the World

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Memorials of the Past—The Land of Darkness—The Time of Ptah-Hotep—Concerning the Book—The Treatise of Ke'Gemni—Date of the Manuscript—An Egyptian Chesterfield—Who was Ptah-Hotep?—His Teaching—Views on Women—The Gods of Egypt—Previous Translations—The Oldest Book Known Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new! It hath been already of old time, Which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; Neither shall there be any remembrance Of things that are to come With those that shall come after. In these days, when all things and memories of the past are at length become not only subservient to, but submerged by, the matters and needs of the immediate present, those paths of knowledge that lead into regions seemingly remote from such needs are somewhat discredited; and the aims of those that follow them whither they lead are regarded as quite out of touch with the real interests of life. Very greatly is this so with archaeology, and the study of ancient and curious tongues, and searchings into old thoughts on high and ever-insistent questions; a public which has hardly time to read more than its daily newspaper and its weekly novel has denounced—almost dismissed—them, with many other noble and wonderful things, as 'unpractical,' whatever that vague and hollow word may mean. As to those matters which lie very far back, concerning the lands of several thousand years ago, it is very generally held that they are the proper and peculiar province of specialists, dry-as-dusts, and persons with an irreducible minimum of human nature. It is thought that knowledge concerning them, not the blank ignorance regarding them that almost everywhere obtains, is a thing of which to be rather ashamed, a detrimental possession; in a word, that the subject is not only unprofitable (a grave offence), but also uninteresting, and therefore contemptible. This is a true estimate of general opinion, although there are those who will, for their own sakes, gainsay it

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