

**STREAMS OF HISTORY**  
**EARLY CIVILIZATIONS**



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**CIVILIZATIONS**

**BY**

**ELLWOOD W. KEMP**

**EDITED BY**

**LISA M. RIPPERTON**

**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**  
**CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

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This edition, first published in 2008 by Yesterday's Classics, an imprint of Yesterday's Classics, LLC, is an edited excerpt from a work originally published by Ginn and Company in 1902. For the complete listing of the books that are published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit [www.yesterdaysclassics.com](http://www.yesterdaysclassics.com). Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Online Children's Literature Project which presents the complete text of hundreds of classic books for children at [www.mainlesson.com](http://www.mainlesson.com).

ISBN-10: 1-59915-254-1

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-254-7

Yesterday's Classics, LLC  
PO Box 3418  
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

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## HOW KUFU LIVED AMONG THE OLD EGYPTIANS

MANY, many years before the Christ Child was born, there lived in far-away Egypt a little boy named Kufu.

The country in which he lived lies far to the east of us, and consists only of a long, narrow valley shut in by high cliffs of white limestone. At its greatest width it is about thirty miles, a distance which one could travel by horseback from morning until noon, but one would have to travel all day from sunrise to sunset on a very fast train, to go over its entire length, which is five hundred and seventy miles. Toward the south the valley gradually grows narrower, and oftentimes at the narrowest places it is only a mile or so wide.

Through the center of this narrow valley winds the famous river, Nile. Along its banks great patches of tall, slender papyrus reeds lift their feathery heads full ten feet above the water, and from its bosom spring the beautiful red, blue and pink cups of the lotus plant, surrounded by its umbrella-like leaves.

On either side of the Nile the country in the valley spreads out like a summer garden—always fresh and green. In this country no one has ever seen a

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snowflake, or watched the great banks of clouds, or often heard the raindrops fall; for there are no clouds, and it seldom rains and never snows. It is always summer.

But you will ask, "How can it always be so fresh and green without rain or snow?" I will tell you. Every year the Nile gets so full that it runs over its banks, spreading out over the valley. When it goes back, in September, it leaves a rich mud or loam, and in this loam the Egyptians raise abundant crops.

But what causes the Nile to act in this strange manner? For many years it was a great mystery. Now we know that away to the south, in the high mountains where the Nile begins, it rains very much at one time of the year, and the little streams rush down into the Nile, bringing with them rich loam from the mountain sides. The good Nile carries it to the eager people, spreads it over their narrow valley, sinks back into its bed again, and seems to smile kindly upon the people as they sow and reap enormous crops. The Ancient Egyptians did not know this. They believed in many gods, and to them it seemed that their great god Osiris lived in the Nile and ruled over it, and that it was from him that their abundance came.

Sometimes, however, away to the south not much water falls. Then the Nile overflows but a short distance from the banks, and famine is sure to follow. To the ancient people this meant that Osiris was angry with them, and many were the sacrifices offered to appease him.

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Shut in as they were by the blue Mediterranean on the north, by the great desert which lay beyond the high cliffs on either side, and by the rocks and waterfalls of the Nile on the south, the Egyptians had little to do with the outside world for a long time, and consequently did not become, until they were a very old nation, either great warriors or traders. But they did become great in other ways, and by hearing the life of Kufu you may find out something of what they were.

You will be interested in hearing of Kufu, for he was the son of a king, and lived in the ancient time. It meant much to be son of a king in olden time when only the sons of kings, nobles and warriors had any chance to obtain an education or in any way rise in the world. The ancient Egyptians thought that their king was a child of a god, and, after his death, would become a god. They regarded him as half divine, and were willing that he should own Egypt and give the land to them as he saw fit. The peasants worked the farms, giving what was raised to the king and accepting back from him any compensation that he offered. The property, time and labor of the Egyptian were at the disposal of his king.

One year when the Nile had been very full and the busy season was at its height, Kufu went with his father's scribe to visit the farms in order to take account of the amount of wheat, barley, and millet raised and to watch the peasants at their work.

Let us follow them on this trip. They sail away in a little boat made of the strong reeds of the papyrus, down the Nile and then up the canals to the farms.

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The hot sun is far to the south, so the trip is pleasant, and Manetho, the scribe, rows among the tall reeds and hunts birds with the throw-stick, while Kufu gathers the beautiful lotus, for he loves it as dearly as you do the roses.

His visits at the farms are very pleasant. He rides on the backs of the donkeys over the great high banks of dirt called dikes. These dikes are the great road-ways between the cities during the time of floods.

On the hillsides, out near the cliffs, are many fields which the Nile does not reach even though there is a great overflow. To water these, the peasants lead the Nile in many small ditches to the hillside. Then up the hillside they dig rows of wells, somewhat resembling the steps of stairs or terraces. Small canals lead the water from the last wells on top of the hill to all parts of the field. To take the water up the hillside, two tall posts are set up on opposite sides of each well, and on top of these a horizontal bar is laid and fastened. On the middle of this bar a long tough pole is balanced. One end of the pole has a heavy lump of clay fastened to it, while to the end that hangs over the well is fastened a long three-cornered bucket, by means of a strong hemp cord. All this arrangement for drawing water is much like the "well-sweep" and "old oaken bucket" which our fathers and grandfathers used to draw water when they were children.

You may draw a picture of a hillside with the wells and well-sweeps, and we will also work out a picture of the wells in the sand. Kufu loves to stand in the cool shade of the palms and watch the peasants draw

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the bucket from the lower well and empty it into the next higher. How the pole creaks on the bar in tune with the peasants' drowsy singsong! Kufu thinks that it is a pretty song even though it has not much tune. They sing it as they slowly and lazily lower the bucket and draw it up with sparkling water.

Everywhere in the fields are peasants planting and harvesting. Some are plowing the tough loam with a rude plow made of a bent stick, while others are breaking the clods with short wooden hoes. The hoe-blade and handle are the same length, about two feet. The blade is narrow and spoon-shaped with a groove in its sides around which a strong rope is fastened. With this rope, the blade may be brought closer to the handle.

We see no harrows or steel plows such as we have today, and the grain that is being sown, we call wheat, barley, or millet, but they call it corn.

Kufu loves to drive the sheep around in circles over the fields, thus tramping the newly sown grain into the soil. When the grain is ripe, he watches the reapers cut it with rude sickles, and then rides the laden donkeys to the threshing floor to see it threshed. Kufu has never heard the whistle or puff of the engine, or the hum of the threshing machine when at work, but he enjoys the harvest greatly. He helps the peasants comb the corn; that is, he pulls the heads from the stalks by means of a comb which is something like our bootjack—the teeth of the comb corresponding to the groove in which the boot fits. The wheat is then spread out over the circular threshing floor, and the

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donkeys driven over it. Sometimes a donkey gets stubborn. Then Kufu laughs because the peasant must pull him around.

After the corn is cleaned by throwing it up so the wind can blow the chaff away, it is taken to the great grain barns or granaries which have been built by the slaves out of brick, and kept and used as it is needed. Far away to the east the people came to Egypt for corn in time of famine. You remember Joseph's brethren came from Canaan to Egypt for corn, and in this way Joseph found his father whom he had not seen for many years.

Vacation is over with the harvest, and Kufu returns home with Manetho, just in time to enter school.

For a large part of the year he attended the school which was conducted in his father's palace. Here were assembled boys from all over Egypt who wanted to become scribes. They wished to read in order to learn the words of the gods, to write that they might record the king's deeds, and to count and measure that they might keep the king's accounts, and measure off his lands; for when the Nile overflowed, it often washed the landmarks away,—new marks must then be made. The scribe received a higher education than any one in Egypt excepting, of course, the one who was to be king.

Kufu's teacher was very strict, but Kufu did not object. The boys all worked diligently, for they feared that the god Thoth would become angry and keep them from learning, if they were idle.

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Their copy-books were rolls of paper made from the pith of the papyrus reed, which was four or five inches in diameter. Kufu made his own paper. He cut the pith into long thin slices, then placed them side by side. Crosswise on top of these he placed other slices, moistened them with Nile water, and pressed them until they were dry. He then trimmed the edges, polished the paper, and made it into rolls.

The boys spent much time in learning to draw. In writing they used pictures instead of signs to express their ideas. Later they combined pictures just as we do letters, to make words.

Kufu, since he is to become the king, has many more things to learn than the other boys, and he must go to the temple to receive part of his education. The king is the high priest of Egypt. He alone, as they think, is a child of a god; he alone can talk with the gods; he alone can worship in the Holy of Holies, the inner-most room of the temple. So Kufu must learn to offer sacrifices, to lead processions, and to chant long prayers.

Let us notice the temple to which Kufu goes. It is meant to resemble the world, and to honor their greatest god, Osiris. The Egyptians had a peculiar view regarding the world; yet it is not strange that they should have had it. They thought that the world was flat, that it was longer than wide, that great, tall pillars held it up, and that the sky, like a great iron bowl, covered it. Notice the ways in which they sought to make their temple resemble the world. It generally faced the river's edge, but stood back some distance from it. It

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was surrounded by a high and thick stone wall. It consisted of alternate rooms and courts, connected by a hallway and large gateways or pylons. The rooms were one story high and covered by a flat roof. The stones of which the temple was built were very large and heavy. They make us think that the Egyptians meant that the temple should last forever. About the temple, but within the outer walls, were pretty flower gardens, ponds filled with the beautiful lotus and tall papyrus, gardens with vegetables, and great yards of geese, birds, and fine cattle. These things were raised to be used when offering sacrifices to the god of the temple.

Leading from the river's edge up to the gateway of the temple was a smoothly paved walk. On both sides of it were rows of sphinxes,—stone figures with the body of a lion and a human face. It is thought they signified protection. The walk was called the avenue of sphinxes. It was bordered on both sides with rows of palm trees.

The tall solid stone doorway, or pylon, of the temple was sixty feet high, about as high as one of our telegraph poles. On each side of it were two broad, thick stone towers, higher than the pylon and used sometimes as observatories. In front of the pylon were two obelisks, or shafts of stone, rising from a small square base to a point one hundred feet high. They were much like the Cleopatra's Needle in Central Park, New York; or the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. On the four highly polished faces of the obelisks were carved pictures of the king performing wonderful deeds.

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The most wonderful part of the temple was the great hypostyle hall,—that is, a hall having a large ceiling resting upon many rows of great columns. These columns were almost as high as the great pylons in front of the temple, and were so thick that three little boys, hand in hand, could not reach around them. They were twelve feet in circumference. The capitals or tops of some of the columns spread out like great inverted bells; others were like the birds, or flowers of the beautiful lotos. The capitals alone were twice as long as you are high and were wider than the tall shafts on which they rested. The base, or bottom, of the column curved inward like a great bulb, and beautiful green leaves bordered it. The whole column was colored bright yellow, red, and green.

Over the surface of the huge stone columns were carved pictures. They showed the king and his court, the scribes at work, farmers sowing and reaping, and slaves building. Like great story-books, they told of the life of the people living at that time; and the way we know something about how the Egyptians lived in that far-away time is, that great scholars have learned to read these pictures, just as we read books.

Early each morning and late each evening the long slant rays of the sun stole down from the small window gratings of the temple far up near the ceiling and reached out to the farthest corner of the room. They lit up the columns, catching and reflecting their brilliant colors. To one standing in the center aisle and gazing off into the forest of stone, softened by the mellow light in which there was more yellow than any

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other color, the sight presented was almost inconceivable in its beauty.

To this temple Kufu came every day to offer upon the stone table-like altars, sacrifices of flowers, geese, birds, fruits, or cattle. He chanted long prayers, joined in the processions and served in one room after another, gradually passing farther into the temple; but not until he became king did he enter the most sacred room, the Holy of Holies.

On great holidays the processions were long and grand,—the King, priests, musicians and dancers leading thousands of the common people through the streets and temples, and to the altars which stood on the banks of the Nile. How thankful they must have been to Isis and Osiris for making the Nile rise and refresh their gardens and fields! I must briefly tell you about “The Welcome to the Nile,” a great procession and sacrifice by which the people worshiped Isis and Osiris:—

A long line of priests, dressed in white, led by one with a leopard skin over his shoulders, approached the stream. Behind came a group of servants, some carrying baskets of the choicest fruits and grain, others leading a young white bullock partly covered with a rich cloth of red, its horns trimmed with flowers and gold.

On either side of the bullock singers and young girl-dancers kept time to the music of flutes, trumpets and drums, while the entire procession chanted songs to Isis, “The tears of Isis! the tears of Isis! Bringer of rich harvests and gifts of the gods!”

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The Nile being reached, prayers were offered to Osiris and Isis. The fruits and grains were cast into the roaring flood, and the priest wearing the leopard skin, drew his sacred knife and mingled the bullock's blood with the roaring waters.

The procession then returned to the temple, the canal gates were opened, the banks were cut, and the waters flowed over all the lowlands. For several weeks the lower country was one vast sea of water. In and near the cities the time was spent in feasting and gladness. "Osiris, the river god, is over the land," said the priests, and since he gives such rich harvests, we must serve him with gladness, or he will not give his blessings again."

When the water had reached its highest mark, the priests again offered gifts to Osiris, and the waters began to fall.

The Egyptians were the first to think much about and believe one of the greatest of truths. They believed that there is life after death; that the soul never dies. And this, it is said, is how they came to think of this great truth. Every morning they looked toward the east and worshiped the great fiery sun-ball. They saw it come up from behind the desert, the Hidden Land, and thought it was a god. They had the following pretty thought about it: In the morning the young sun is the pretty child Horus, sailing up the eastern sky in a little boat. He has a spear with which he will kill the monster Darkness, who devoured him the night before. At noon he is the strong man, Ra, but by night he has grown to be the weak old man, Atum.

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Then the monster Darkness devours him again; but Atum wrestles with the monster and comes to life again, rising the next morning as the beautiful child, Horus.

But their idea of life after death was quite different from our idea. Kufu's father told Kufu that just as the sun returned each morning to live again in its old form, although seemingly killed the night before, so the soul would return to the body to live in it again, after having been purified in the Hidden Land. They thought it took a very long time,—three thousand years,—for it to be purified and ready to come back to earth.

Because of this belief, the Egyptians sought to preserve the body until the return of the soul. They studied the effect of various oils and spices on the body and worked out the process of embalming, that is preserving it, which is used to some extent, even today. The embalmed body, as prepared for burial by the ancient Egyptians, was called a mummy. Perhaps some day you will see a real mummy. If you ever go to Egypt, that is one thing you will surely see. I wonder if these ancient embalmers by studying the body so closely discovered any of the facts about medicine that are known by the doctors of today.

This belief in immortality led the Egyptians to make statues. They feared that in some way the mummy might be destroyed, and the soul, returning, would have no form in which to live; so those Egyptians that could afford it had statues of themselves made from stone. The statues were called "doubles." It

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was the belief of the people that the soul would enter into and dwell in the double if it were unable to find the mummy. The effort of the sculptor was to make the statue look *exactly* like the person; otherwise the soul would fail to recognize it. Now the truest and greatest artist, when he carves statues or paints pictures, tries to make the thing he paints or carves a little *more* perfect than the real thing represented. Because the Egyptian artist did not do this, people have not so much cared for the art of the Egyptian as for that of the Greeks. If you look at the pictures of Egyptian statues, they will often look large and stiff; the Greek statues, on the other hand, are smaller, but much more graceful.

However, this same belief that the soul would come back to the earth and want its body again, led the Egyptians to do things so great that the world has marveled at them ever since. They built tombs in which to keep their mummies and doubles. Since the kings were to become gods, the possibility that their souls might wander forever without bodies, was a horrible thought to the Egyptians. So, for miles up and down the banks of the Nile, they built immense tombs for them, which cost years of toil and great sums of money.

That you may better understand the grandeur of an Egyptian king's tomb, let us notice the one that Kufu built for himself when he became king.

Above his city and to the east were low hills of sand-covered rocks. One of these rocks the wind had blown bare. Kufu selected this hill as the place for his

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tomb, for it was high, dry, quiet and peaceful. All around was the wide, quiet desert.

Kufu had a good architect, and to him he gave one hundred thousand slaves,—more slaves than there are people in many of our cities. They made level a space seven hundred and fifty feet square. It was large enough to cover thirteen acres of ground. Great blocks of limestone were hewn out by the slaves and brought from the high cliffs. The blocks were thirty feet long, or half as long as the columns of the temple, and as thick as one of you boys is tall, or about four feet thick. They cut these stones and shaped and fitted them perfectly on the thirteen-acre square, entirely covering it. On top of this layer they put another one a little smaller, thus leaving a step on the first layer that extended entirely around the square. Layer after layer was laid in this manner, until the top, which was just a few feet square, was laid. The top was a square of thirty feet; we can mark that off in the schoolhouse yard.

But this was not a solid pile of stone. Large halls about four feet high by three feet wide were left in it as it was built. Some led down into rooms cut out of the rock of the hill; others into small rooms, one of which was to receive the body of Kufu. A number of rooms were made, although but one was needed, in order to confuse persons attempting to steal away the jewelry and the like which was buried with the king.

After Kufu's death they placed his body in one of the rooms and filled up the small hall leading to it with granite blocks. Then the large steps that had been

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left on the sides of the pyramid were filled with blocks of stone, cut so as to fit neatly into and fill them. Thin slabs of highly polished stone were then cemented over the four faces of the pyramid, making it look like a great solid rock. Its four faces sloped to a point four hundred and fifty feet high.

Thirty years were required in building this huge tomb. Think of the time, money, labor and lives that were given up in order that the king's body might be preserved! But in that day they did not think as much of the comfort and rights of the common people as we do now. If it took a million lives to build one king's tomb, they thought it was worth it.

Many years after Kufu was dead, Arabs came from the east and stripped off the outer casings and fillings of the four sides, leaving them bare. Hundreds of people go to Egypt every year to see the Great Pyramid and climb its steep steps. Would you like to take an imaginary climb? Three little Arabs will help you. One is at your back pushing, while two stand on the steps above and pull. Do not look down, or to the right or left. If you do, you will become dizzy, and run great risk of falling and being dashed to pieces.

At last you are on the top. As you look about, you see many other pyramids like this one, standing on the silent desert, and many temples scattered up and down the banks of the Nile. You see a large sandy desert cut by a strip of green country, in which are farmers and herders, brick-makers and builders. The Nile, like a large kite, lies with its silvery ribbed head toward the

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north and its tail winding far southward through a green meadowland.

In taking this last view of Kufu's strange country, it is interesting to remember that these people who lived so long ago, gave to the world many ideas which have never died, but which have grown ever better and continued to help the world ever since. The Egyptians gave the world in its youthtime its first lessons in writing, in paper making, in building, in carving statues, in measuring, and more than any other people of the olden time, taught the belief that the soul never dies.