

Although Europeans had been traveling to Egypt for centuries seeking treasure and adventure or as part of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, travel was often dangerous. When the Scotsman James Bruce arrived in Egypt in 1768 to search for the source of the Nile, he was compelled to dress *à la turc* in order to avoid detection and harassment by *banditti*, and walled monasteries provided the safest accommodations. Egypt changed dramatically, however, following Napoleon's invasion in 1798 and the subsequent British occupation as the country was drawn into the arena of European politics. As the American tourist John Lloyd Stephens observed: "Here the long-cherished animosity of France and England sought a new battle-field, as if conscious that the soil of Europe had too often been moistened with human blood."¹

Having destroyed the power of the Ottoman Mamluk sultans, Napoleon introduced sweeping reforms in the administration of Egypt by inviting the participation of local Egyptian leaders; roads and factories were built, public health and sanitation improved, and a national Arabic press was created. The defeat of the French by the British at Aboukir in 1801 provided Muhammad Ali with the opportunity to consolidate his own position in Egypt, becoming the Ottoman Viceroy in 1805. His economic and military reforms based on European models created a stable land that grew increasingly attractive to western tourists. Upon meeting the Pasha in 1835, John Lloyd Stephens remarked that:

everybody had great curiosity to visit that interesting country; that heretofore it had been very difficult to get there, and dangerous to travel in when there; but now the facilities of access were greatly increased, and traveling in Egypt had become so safe under his government, that strangers would soon come with as much confidence as they felt while traveling in Europe.²

1. John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land*, edited with an introduction by Victor Wolfgang von Hagen (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991), p. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Eager to sustain and improve their commercial and military access to India via Egypt, the British established transit agencies to assist people traveling between Alexandria, Cairo, and Suez. By the 1840s European and American travelers to Egypt numbered in the thousands.³

When Napoleon invaded Egypt, French *savants* scoured the country drawing, copying, and measuring the ancient monuments. Their findings, published as *Déscription de L'Égypte* (1809–13) inspired British and German Egyptologists to follow suit. John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875) made numerous expeditions to Egypt between 1821 and 1842 copying inscriptions and paintings from tombs and other monuments. He authored several major books on Egyptology, including *Topography of Thebes and General View of Egypt* (1835), *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (3 vols., 1837), and his popular guidebook *Modern Egypt and Thebes*, which Nightingale read during her voyage up the Nile.

German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius (1810–84) led an historic expedition to Egypt in 1843–45 under the tutelage of Kaiser Wilhelm IV, the findings of which were published in twelve monumental volumes titled *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien* (1849–59). Nightingale consulted other works by Lepsius, such as his *Chronologie der Ägypter* (1849). Additionally, she read works by her friend (and Lepsius's teacher) Christian von Bunsen (1791–1860) (fig. 4), particularly his *Egypt's Place in Universal History* (5 vols., 1848–60). In addition to being an Egyptologist and Orientalist, Bunsen served as the Prussian ambassador to the Court of St. James from 1842 to 1854. His home in London was a center of great scholarly discourse, and he proved to be of considerable importance to Nightingale's intellectual and spiritual development. As mentioned earlier, Bunsen encouraged her interest in nursing and provided her with information on the Institution of Deaconesses at Kaiserswerth, which she would visit before returning to England in 1850. Through her friendship with Bunsen, Nightingale became familiar with the spiritual traditions of the Near and Far East.

In addition to Egyptological works, during her voyage on the Nile, Nightingale also read a travel account written by Harriet Martineau (1802–76) titled *Eastern Life: Past and Present*, pub-

3. The Suez Canal was not completed until 1869. Anthony Sattin, *Lifting the Veil: British Society in Egypt, 1768–1956*, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1988), p. 48.

lished in 1848. Martineau, a friend of Nightingale's maternal aunt Julia Smith, was a prolific writer of fiction and travel books, as well as works on history, politics, religion and social issues. In 1846 Martineau traveled to Egypt with friends Mr. and Mrs. Richard Yates. For both Martineau and Nightingale, the journey to Egypt was as much a psychic one as it was physical, providing an opportunity to wrestle with their unconventional religious views. Martineau wrote that "a Nile voyage is as serious a labour as the mind and spirit can be involved in"⁴ and often wandered off by herself for reflection as did Nightingale. Both authors entered into lengthy discourses on Egyptian religion, deriving great inspiration from the ancient beliefs and remarking on the present flaws of Christian doctrine. In light of what they learned of ancient Egyptian religion, Martineau and Nightingale were compelled to reevaluate the singularity of Christianity. They would discover many elements of Egyptian theology in Judaism and Christianity, as well as in Greek philosophy. As such, Martineau considered it "necessary to go back to Egypt for the key."⁵ *Eastern Life*, like Nightingale's letters from Egypt, is therefore much more than a travelogue. As will be seen in the course of discussion, Martineau's book proved to be of great interest to Nightingale. (Some years later, Martineau would come to admire Nightingale's plans for public health reform and popularized them in the press. Sharing common concerns, the two corresponded on a variety of social issues.)⁶

Nightingale also turned to the writings of Henry Martyn during her travels. Martyn (1781–1812), an Anglican missionary and chaplain of the East India Company, traveled to India and Persia where he translated the New Testament into Hindustani and Persian. Nightingale read his *Memoirs*, (first published in 1819 with many subsequent editions), quoting him in her diary entry of May 13. Martyn and Nightingale expressed similar sentiments in their writings: both possessed deepfelt piety, earnestly struggled to align their wills with that of God through service, and lamented their weaknesses. Both marked the anniversary of

4. *Eastern Life: Past and Present* (London: Edward Moxon, 1848), vol. 1, p. 86.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 107.

6. See Sue Goldie, *A Calendar of Letters of Florence Nightingale* (Oxford: Oxford Microform Publications, 1983), and Martha Vicinus and Bea Nergaard (eds.), *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

the date when God called them into his service, and on the occasion of their thirtieth birthdays, both recalled the life of Christ. Nightingale's remarks of May 12, 1850, are in fact so similar to those made by Martyn on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday as to suggest 'unconscious spiritual plagiarism.' He wrote: "This day I finished the thirtieth year of my unprofitable life. . . . I am now at the age at which the Saviour of men began his ministry,"⁷ and she: "To day I am 30—the age Christ began his mission."

'Laden with learned books,' including works by Wilkinson, Bunsen, Lepsius, Martineau, and Martyn as well as Charlotte Brontë and William Cowper (see later), Nightingale and the Bracebridges landed at Alexandria on November 18, 1849. There, in addition to the usual sightseeing, she spent a great deal of time with the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul—not for religious reasons but because of their nursing practice: "they bleed, dress wounds, and dispense medicines." Yet, she was touched by a children's mass where she observed "people of all nations and tongues uniting in the worship of one God."⁸ From Alexandria they boarded a steam-tug that carried them via the Mahmoudieh Canal to the Rosetta branch of the Nile. The travelers then continued on to Cairo where they boarded their *dahabiah* (christened 'Parthenope' in honor of Florence's sister) and set sail up the Nile. Making only a few brief stops, they would sail to Egypt's southern frontier, marked by the rock-cut temples of Rameses II at Abu Simbel, and then slowly make their way back northward down the Nile, visiting archaeological sites along the way.

Nightingale's diary begins after the party reached Thebes where they stayed overnight in order to explore the Temple of Luxor before continuing southward. Although these early entries contain rather sketchy accounts of her activities, even the very first entry subtly indicates that Nightingale was preoccupied with other matters. This is evident from her reference to 'dreaming,' which had been a problem for her since her youth and continued to be so during her trip and thereafter. 'Dreaming' is probably the 'enemy' she refers to (March 21, June 18), and also the 'murderer of her thoughts' (March 15). Undoubtedly, she was dreaming of

7. *Memoir of the Rev. Henry Martyn* (New York: Protestant Episcopal Society for the promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1858), pp. 257–58.

8. *Letters from Egypt*, p. 6 (1854 ed.); p. 24 (Sattin's ed.)

the manner in which she might serve God, that is through nursing, and how she might accomplish it given her family's objections. Later, in her feminist polemic titled "Cassandra," she would write:

Women dream till they have no longer the strength to dream; those dreams against which they so struggle, so honestly, vigorously, and conscientiously, and so in vain, yet which are their life, without which they could not have lived; those dreams go at last.⁹

The diary itself (BM Add. MSS 45,846) is an 'Agenda-Moniteur ou Carnet de Poche' for 1850 printed in Paris by E. Marc-Aurel. According to a letter to her mother in November 1849, Nightingale purchased the diary in Marseilles before embarking on the voyage to Egypt.¹⁰ On the inside cover, she has written: "F.N.'s Diary 1850. Egypt &c." As the diary is quite small, measuring just $5\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{4}$ inches, in several instances she has taken up the space allotted for several days' notes with her thoughts of a single day. The entries for January to the beginning of March are for the most part written in pen and thereafter in pencil. The handwriting is quite small as a result of the diary's size and in a few cases illegible. In the transcription following, illegible words are indicated by dashes enclosed in square brackets [— —]. Words or phrases that have been added for clarification or that were lacking in the original but required by context are also enclosed in square brackets. Doubtful readings are indicated by a question mark in square brackets [?]. The months and days that were printed in the diary in French are here given in English. Given her proficiency in several languages, Nightingale occasionally resorted to French and German in her diary. Translations of foreign words and expressions appear in square brackets alongside the original, whereas translations of longer sentences have been placed in footnotes. Words abbreviated by Nightingale (eveng for "evening," cd for "could," wd for "would," etc.) have been rendered in full for ease in reading.

9. *Suggestions for Thought* (1860 ed.), vol. 2, p. 403.

10. Letter of November 1849 (from a copy in the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London).

Other than these exceptions and the accompanying commentary, all other text is original to the diary. Nightingale is inconsistent in her transliteration of Egyptian place names (e.g., Aboo Simbel and Ipsamboul, being in fact the same location). These variations are retained here. Individuals named in the diary have been identified whenever possible. On the end sheets of the diary, Nightingale jotted down notes relating to religious matters. As they are disjointed and without context, they are not included here.

"F.N.'S DIARY 1850. EGYPT &C."

January 1850

Thebes

1. Tuesday

6½ Wrote home

8½ Temple Luxor¹¹

10 Wrote home; breakfast; stood on poop.

12 Left — read to Σ ¹² Wilkinson & Martineau¹³ (Carnac)

4 Dined on deck — read Survey of Thebes & sat on deck

6 (¼) slept

8½ supper

9½ washing & dreaming

10½ bed

2. Wednesday

7 Temple of Armant (Hermonthis)¹⁴

8½ Breakfast

11. The temple of Luxor, dedicated to the god Amun, was built by Amenhotep III (1390–52 B.C.) and Rameses II (1279–12 B.C.). Nightingale and the Bracebridges would spend more time exploring the temple upon their return journey down the Nile in February [see later].

12. Σ indicates Selina, the wife of Charles Bracebridge, whom Nightingale designated by the Greek letter throughout her diary and correspondence.

13. For Wilkinson and Martineau, see introduction above pp. 16–17.

14. The temple of Armant, which received its latest additions under Cleopatra VII (51–30 B.C.), was still standing in the nineteenth century. It has since been destroyed.

9½ Reading Wilkinson to Σ & Lepsius with Mr. B.¹⁵

1½ Wrote home

2 (¼) Writing

3 dinner and wrote home till

7 read Arabian Nights to Mr. B. & supper till

10 finished Epicurean till

12 passed Esne with a fair wind

obliged to stop till moon rose—

then ran aground— & stuck till morning

3. Thursday

7½ Wrote letters

9 breakfast & making plans for journey

12 [reading] Bunsen with Mr. B.

3 dinner

4 letters (¼) & journal

anchored off Edfoo

4. Friday

Walked before breakfast. [Reading] Bunsen all day. Making an analysis of the Dynasties. The hottest weather we have had.

5. Saturday

Hagar Silsilis¹⁶— saw the little rock corridor before breakfast.

Bunsen's Dynasties all day.

6. Sunday

Asouan 12 noon. I[sland]. of Elephantine. Evening walk in Syene.

Wrote home.

7. Monday

Cataracts 9—½ p[ast] 1. Philae. Wrote home.

8. Tuesday

Began Bunsen again & his hard work. Kalabsheh. Entered the

tropic.

15. I.e., Charles Bracebridge.

16. Gebel el-Silsila, site of ancient sandstone quarries.

9. Wednesday

Bunsen all day. Paolo¹⁷ gave me my poor little chameleon—it slept on my bed.

10. Thursday

Bunsen. First walk in Nubia. Chameleon very miserable—would not eat.

11. Friday

Bunsen. Chameleon caught his first fly. Korosko—Pacha's tents there on his way to Darfur.¹⁸

12. Saturday

Bunsen all day. Calm—towing—exceedingly warm delightful weather 110° on deck 88° in cabin.

13. Sunday

Bunsen. Walk on shore among the Castor Oils—human¹⁹& vegetable. Stopped at Derr—saw the temple in the rock—Capital of the Laputae.²⁰

14. Monday

Finished my History of the XXXI Dyns. of Egypt for Mr. Bracebridge. Began Lepsius.



17. According to a letter of November 14, 1849, Paolo was a Maltese who had traveled with the Nightingales fifteen years earlier, and "has been up the Nile almost every winter since." See Sue Goldie, *Calendar of the Letters of Florence Nightingale* (Oxford, 1983), 2.E13,456. He is almost certainly the same Paolo Nuozzo, the Maltese servant who accompanied American tourist John Lloyd Stephens to Egypt in 1835. In his popular travel account, Stephens wrote of him: "He was a man about thirty-five years old . . . a passionate admirer of ruins, particularly the ruins of the Nile. . . . He had lived several years in Cairo, and had traveled on the Nile before, and understood all the little arrangements necessary for the voyage" (*Incidents of Travel in Egypt*, pp. 39-40).

18. The *pacha* (or pasha) refers to Abbas I, grandson of Muhammad Ali. A despot and generally suspicious of Europeans, he did little to carry on the reforms begun by his grandfather. He was murdered at the hands of his servants in 1854.

19. Nightingale is referring to the Nubian practice of applying castor oil to the hair and skin.

20. A rock-cut temple of Rameses II is located at Derr. The 'capital of the Laputae' is a reference to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. According to the story,

On January 15, the travelers reached the southernmost point of their voyage, Abu Simbel (var., Aboo Simbel, Ipsamboul), where they visited the rock-cut temples of Rameses II (1279–1212 B.C.) and his queen, Nefretari. Nightingale was deeply impressed with the temples, writing that she “felt more *at home*, perhaps, than in any place of worship” she was ever in.²¹ Rather than merely describing the temples to her family, she entered into a lengthy theological discourse of good and evil. Believing evil to be a necessary part of the developmental process in the evolution of human consciousness, she explained that “evil is not the opposer of the good, but its *collaborateur*—the left hand of God, as the good is His right.”²²

She then continued with a discussion of man’s relationship with God, using a scene from the temple to illustrate her point. The scene she described depicts Rameses:

entering the presence of a trinity of gods, I think the sublimest ideal of prayer that ever entered the mind of man to conceive—not shrinking, not awe-struck, he is not even kneeling, not supplicating for forgiveness in that mean and selfish spirit which says, ‘Hide thy face from my sins,’ instead of saying, ‘turn all the light of thy countenance upon my sins, that in that light I may see them, and accepting their consequences, take those consequences as the means to correct them; but raising one hand a little, he stands with face upturned and head uncovered, reverentially offering a reasonable service. . . . Would that I could have understood all that that glorious, yet perfectly human, countenance conveyed . . . the

Lagado, the metropolis of Laputae, is a city of strangely built houses in disrepair. C.f. letter of January 21, 1850 (*Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., p. 158):

And I have never so much as mentioned his temple at Derr (the capital of Nubia), hewn in the rock, where he [Rameses II] appears with his faithful lion. But I really don’t remember it; I only remember looking out between the portico columns, and thinking that I was in the capital of the Laputae, or some other of Gulliver’s countries—so strange, so little like the dwellings of human beings did this capital look.

21. Letter of March 1850, *Letters from Egypt*, p. 290.

22. Letter of January 17, 1850, *ibid.*, p. 128.

mind, which does not offer praise, tiresome praise to God, but says, after its great prototype, 'I and my Father are one,' for his will is one with God, whatever may befall. . . . The Rameses is that of a perfect intellectual and spiritual man, who feels his connection with that of God, whose first and last lesson through His Christ has been, 'Be *one with me*,' not be my instrument, nor my worshipper, nor my petitioner, but *one with me*. I am glad to have seen that representation of prayer, it has taught me more than all the sermons I ever read."²³

Humanity's relationship with God was of primary interest to her, and she later addressed this very subject in her *Suggestions for Thought*:

The word "worship," however, seems hardly to express what God wants of us. He does not want to be praised, to be adored, to have his glory sung. . . . What he desires seems to be accordance with Him, that we should be one with Him, not prostrate before Him. . . . I would try to teach a child—not to "submit" to God, nor to pray that anything should be otherwise—but to second Him. I would try to inspire it with the idea that it, the child, can second GOD!²⁴

The entries for the first few months of Nightingale's diary are frustratingly brief and contain cryptic references to making some kind of 'vow' and dreaming 'in the very face of God' at Abu Simbel.



15. Tuesday

Came in sight of Aboo Simbel [fig. 7] with a fair wind soon after 9. Made up our minds to go no further. Walked a long way south to take my last look Abyssinia wards—Sacrifice in the Temple.²⁵

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–40. (This passage was not included in Sattin's edition.)

24. *Suggestions for Thought* (Calabria & Macrae), p. 125.

25. The 'sacrifice' is described in the letter of January 17, 1850 to her family:

16. Wednesday

At sunrise, before the Colossi [fig. 8]. Osirides [i.e. the Osiris columns in the temple] lighted up. Made a vow in the sacred place. Dreadful fights with Trout.²⁶

17. Thursday

Sunrise in the Osiris hall. Sailed at 9. Wrote letters—Dreamed in the very face of God.

18. Friday

Long morning with Mr. B. making out his notes of Ipsamboul [i.e. Abu Simbel] & plan—Nicholsons came on board. Pleasant evening by myself—they all at Ibream²⁷—such a sunset.

19. Saturday

Wrote about Ipsamboul. Went on shore to see the dromos of sphynxes at Sabora.²⁸

20. Sunday

Rowed in the little boat to see the temple of Hermes Trismegistus [fig. 9].²⁹

Letter from home. One of my 3 chameleons died. I had got for the first two companions.[sic]

Phthah's temple cave at Jerf Hossayn. Oh heavenly fire, purify me—free me from this slavery.



In the evening we made a great fire upon the altar [in the temple at Abu Simbel], and while our turbaned crew fed it, we sat in the entrance on the top of our hillock, and enjoyed the sight and feeling of the ancient worship restored. (Letters from Egypt, 1854 ed., p. 141).

26. Her female servant during the voyage.

27. Qasr Ibrim—a site marked by an ancient fortress, a temple of Taharqa (690–64 B.C.) and rock-cut shrines.

28. Wadi el-Sebu'a, the site of a temple of Amun and Re-Horakhte built by Rameses II.

29. A temple at Dakka dedicated to Thoth, called 'Hermes Trismegistus' by the Greeks (see p.27).

Nightingale's personal distress at this time is clearly indicated by the plea to be freed from 'this slavery,' a reference perhaps to her unrelenting thoughts of fulfilling some kind of purpose in life and escaping the confines of her upper-class lifestyle. The 'temple cave' referred to above is a structure built by Rameses II at Gerf Hossein dedicated to the god Ptah. As Ptah (var., Phthah) was identified by the Greeks with their god Hephaistos, the Vulcan, Nightingale thus described the temple of Ptah as the dwelling of "Heavenly Fire" to which the purified spirit would return:

In the solemn twilight we entered the awful cave of Phthah, the God of Fire, the Creator. The shekh of the village, with his descendants, walked before us, carrying great serpents of fire to light up the rude magnificence of this great terrible place. The serpents were thick twisted coils of palm fibre set on fire; but they looked like Moses' serpent set up in the wilderness; and twisted and flamed before this fire shrine, this God of the Hidden Fire, who has his dwelling in the thick darkness. . . . I should like to have seen this dwelling of the "Heavenly Fire" (who will some day welcome back the "tired spirit" to its "accustomed home," and refine away all but the pure ore) in silence and stillness, for I can tell you nothing about the temple.³⁰

This very letter, alluded to in the next entry, continued with a lengthy exposition on the metaphysical significance of Ptah and Egyptian ideas concerning creation.



21. Monday

Wrote Hermes Trismegistus letter.

In the afternoon to Kalabsheh & Beit el Wellee — a little gem of the great Rameses. Kalabsheh a vulgar extravagance of the Romans. Rapids of Kalabsheh by moonlight — the wildest scene — battle of the crew.³¹

30. Letter of January 21, 1850, *Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., pp. 148–49.

31. Reference to a brawl that broke out on board during the descent through the cataract (see letter, 1854 ed., pp. 156–57). At Kalabsha, there is a tem-



Hermes Trismegistus, to whom Nightingale refers in these entries, refers to Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom, whom the Greeks identified with Hermes, and called the 'thrice-great' (*trismegistus*). A body of philosophical and occult texts, collectively known as the *Hermetica*, were attributed to him during the Graeco-Roman period, and for centuries the texts were believed to predate Moses, Pythagoras, and Plato. It was not until the seventeenth century that the texts were correctly dated to the late first to third centuries A.D. Although the texts incorporate elements of Platonic, Stoic, and Judaic philosophy, it has been demonstrated in recent years that they are equally consistent with ancient Egyptian theology as well.³² Certainly Nightingale believed that they were representative of Egyptian thought, as judged by her letters.

Although lacking a single dogma or scriptural canon, the philosophical *Hermetica* express a passionate piety, a craving for the deliverance from the tyranny of Fate, for the knowledge (*gnosis*) and understanding of God, identification with Him, and in the end immortality by union with the One.³³ The strong mystical elements of the *Hermetica* appealed greatly to Nightingale as attested by the frequent references to Hermetism in her letters from Egypt.³⁴ In one of them, Nightingale quoted at length from *Pimander*, a hermetic text that describes the origin of the cosmos and the creation of man. Pimander, "the Mind of the Sovereignty" (Sovereignty = God), reveals to Hermes Trismegistus the origins of the cosmos from a watery abyss, reminiscent of Genesis I, but even more similiar to the primordial waters of Nun in the Egyptian tradition. Out of this darkness is born light (= Mind), and from the light emanates the Word (Logos), the 'son of God.' The Word then establishes order out of the primeval chaos.

ple built by Augustus, and at Beit el-Wali, a rock-cut temple built by Rameses II.

32. Erik Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1984).

33. H. Idris Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Chicago: Ares, 1985 reprint), p. 75.

34. The 1854 edition of Nightingale's *Letters from Egypt* contains more references to hermetic philosophy than does Anthony Sattin's edition.

Mind, comprising both male and female within itself (as is the case with the Egyptian god Atum), is able to procreate and thus produces another Mind, the 'Maker of things,' the Demiurge. As Mind the Maker and the Word are of the same substance, both having arisen from Mind the Father, they unite. In doing so, however, the Word soars up and away from the coarser elements of creation, thereby depriving the natural world of reason. Man, to the contrary, arises from Mind the Father, who is light and life, and thus is endowed with an immortal principle. Although spiritual in his origin, when Man falls in love with Nature, he goes to dwell in matter that is "devoid of reason." Pimander concludes his discourse on cosmogenesis with the adage that if man could but know himself, he would discover his true divine nature and have eternal life. Noting the biblical parallels, Nightingale explained that:

the Father of all, who is the light and the life, created man after His likeness, and received him as His son, and being pleased with man in His own image, gave him power over His works

(And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good; and He gave man to have dominion over the fish of the sea, &c. &c.)

Man then "falls into slavery," God warning him "that the love of the earthly part of himself shall be the cause of his death."

"He then who knows himself, wins the good superior to himself;" and, "he who lets himself be deceived by the love of the body, is thrown into the shadow of death." "God, who is wisdom, wills that every man, who has part in His wisdom, should know himself."³⁵

Pimander then proceeds to describe the means for entering into eternal life. Following the dissolution of the material body, "the senses go back into their own sources, becoming parts of the universe, and entering into fresh combinations to do other work." This, of course, suggests reincarnation to which Nightingale refers in her "Visions of Temples" (see Part II). The spirit, however, as-

35. *Letters from Egypt* (1854 ed.), letter of February 1850, pp. 225-27. (This passage is not included in Sattin's edition of the letters.)

cends through the heavenly spheres to the presence of God, actually entering *into* God. Nightingale expounds upon this in her letters in order to present her own view that it is through trial and tribulation that humanity is made perfect:

In that dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus between Pimander and Thoth, he says what truth is. The soul went through several mystic regions before it began again the course of its transformations — those transformations, which only meant the trials, the stages which the divine emanation has to go through before arriving at perfection.

Noting the presence of the perennial philosophy in all faiths, at the conclusion of her discussion, she exclaimed:

How like to one another are the highest beliefs in all spiritualised nations; and how much I find in Hermes Trismegistus of what — — — used to say to me!

With its emphasis on *gnosis* and self-knowledge as a means of knowing God, the *Hermetica* are not unlike the contemporary Christian gnostic scriptures that combined elements of Judaism, Christianity, and more ancient traditions. Gnosticism was also of interest to Nightingale, and thus she urged her friend Julius von Mohl, a German orientalist, to write a book on the Gnostics "whose idea was, as you say, a sort of quintessence of the idea of all the other Religions."³⁶ (At this time, gnosticism was known chiefly through the vituperations of the Church Fathers, and a work written by German theologian F. C. Baur titled *Die Christliche Gnosis*, published in 1835. The bulk of Gnostic texts comprised by the Nag Hammadi Codices were not discovered until 1945.) Nightingale's interest in Hermetism and gnosticism are indicative of her interests in a more syncretic religion that combined elements of late pagan and Christian theology. Later in 1869 she wrote:

I like the books of the early centuries of this Millennium . . . because they seem to me to rise so much higher

36. BM Add. MSS. 46,385.f.17.

than those, whether Protestant or R. Catholic or Rationalist of these later centuries, in the appreciation of how this life is only a little piece of an eternal education. And they often took pains to show that, if one's state of mind is in conformity with this, what does the loss of all the sacraments in the world signify — or sudden or early death or loss of opportunities or &c. &c.?³⁷

It appears, however, that she would never reconcile herself to the 'lost opportunities.'



22. Tuesday

Put my two poor little chameleons ashore at Taphis. I was so afraid of their following their comrade's example — so sorry to part with them — they were such nice company.

Went on shore at Dabod to see the 3 Pylons. Only Roman.³⁸

Sate long in the cold moonlight on the deck watching our approach to Philae [figs. 10–11] & preparing myself for it. Moonlight walk on the island. Sitting on Philae by the temple of Isis with the roar of the Cataract I thought I should see *Him* [i.e. Christ]. *His* shadow in the moonlight in the Propylaeum.



Like Abu Simbel, the theology conveyed by the worship of the goddess Isis at Philae appealed to Nightingale's spiritual disposition. According to Egyptian myth, Osiris was a beneficent king of Egypt who was murdered and dismembered at the hands of his brother Seth, and subsequently resurrected by his faithful wife Isis. The resurrection of Osiris signified the regeneration of all life in the cosmos, from the spiritual rebirth of an individual after death to the annual inundation of the Nile and the regrowth of plants in the spring. With its elements of death and resurrection, the myth

37. BM Add. MSS. 45,845.f.26.

38. Originally built in the third century A.D., the temple of Dabod received additions under the Ptolemies as well as Roman emperors Augustus and Tiberius. In the 1960s, the temple was presented as a gift to Spain and moved to Madrid.

of Osiris thus provided an obvious parallel to the passion of Christ as Nightingale related to her family:

I never *loved* a place so much — never felt a place so homey: thank God for all we have felt and thought here. Every moment of that precious week, from before sunrise to long after moonlight had begun, I spent upon the Sacred Island, most of it in Osiris' chamber. . . .

I cannot describe to you the feeling at Philae. The myths of Osiris are so typical of our Saviour that it seemed to me as if I were coming to a place where He had lived — like going to Jerusalem; and when I saw a shadow in the moonlight in the temple court, I thought, "perhaps I shall see him: now he is there."

The chamber of Osiris was like the place where *He* was buried; and after our little service on the Sunday morning, I went and sat there, and I thought I had never sate in any place so sacred, nor ever could, except in Syria.³⁹



23. Wednesday

At sunrise we were on Philae & discovered the Chamber of Osiris.

Lewis's there.⁴⁰ Went to Osiris' Chamber — staid there till 3 o'clock. Mr. & Mrs. Lewis dined with us. Cold moonlight walk on Philae.

39. Letter of January 28, 1850, *Letters from Egypt* (1854 ed.), p. 160.

40. John Frederick Lewis (1805–76), British painter of Italian, Spanish, and Eastern subjects who traveled to Egypt in 1842. He returned to England in 1851 and subsequently became president of the Water-colour Society. In a letter to her parents, Florence wrote of the Lewises:

He is making a series of drawings of the temple of Isis, and is a picture himself; he always wears the Turkish dress—a blue gubbeh, white kaftan, red turban, and a long white beard: his wife, a nice little woman, young and pretty, always sits by him. (letter of January 28, 1850, *Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., p. 162).

When writer William Thackeray visited his friend Lewis in Cairo, he too was struck by how 'orientalized' Lewis had become. (See his *From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*.)

24. Thursday

While we were in the Sacred Chamber, Northampton party disturbed us⁴¹ — but we stuck to it and were there almost all day.

Surprised there by a man asking for baksheesh. Our Passion Week.

25. Friday

Went over to Bidji — up the rocks to a burying ground in a solitary basin at the top of the island — so wild, but not desolate — & down to a palm tree oasis, a happy valley & deep green Tara of the Nile on the other side — walked to Padre Ryllo's⁴² church on the main land. Osiris chamber. Dinner at Lewis's at Mahatta by moonlight.

26. Saturday

Went with Mrs. Lewis to see Zehrab & her swimming aunt on Bijji⁴³ — dear huts — & walked over the island with a party — how different it looked. But yesterday I spoiled it all with dreaming. Disappointed with myself & the effect of Egypt on me — Rome was better.



During her stay in Rome, secure in a convent surrounded by the familiar images of Christianity with the Madre Santa Columba as her spiritual director, Nightingale was apparently at peace with herself and the world, however briefly. Throughout her Egyptian travels, however, she seems to have struggled

41. Later in Aswan, she wrote of the Northampton party: ". . . there was such a 'ruck' of English boats there — all the Northampton party, and a thousand others — and nothing to eat, for they had devoured everything like locusts, even all the rice and milk of Syene, that we turned savage and sailed before sunrise." (Letter of January 28, 1850, *Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., p. 169.)

42. Padre Ryllo, a priest of Santa Trinita de Monti in Rome and acquaintance of the Madre Santa Columba, was martyred in Abyssinia.

43. Zehrab was a friend of Mrs. Lewis, "a child of four years old, the daughter of a widow of sixteen. Zehrab's aunt, of ten, who is just married, and who showed us her house with great pride, the nicest in the island, swam over to see Mrs. Lewis at Mahatta this morning: every body swims here." (Letter of January 28, 1850, *Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., p. 164.)

to enjoy herself while dealing alone with her thoughts of a more meaningful existence, or what she called 'dreaming.' In Egypt, she would confront her 'demons' like the early Christian monks in their desert hermitages. The ancient monuments, with their multifarious depictions of divinities, served only to reflect her own unsettled state of mind, challenging her with questions concerning the nature of God and her very own existence. Rather than purging such images from her mind as early Christian zealots had attempted to do by defacing the monuments, Nightingale meditated on the ancients' religion, incorporating elements of it into her own unusual and eclectic theology. In an act of homage to the ancient gods, she left her crucifix in the sanctuary of the temple at Philae. Disturbed by the poverty of the modern Egypt, she pondered the destiny of humanity, how great nations could rise to great heights and then fall into ruin. In contrast to sentiments expressed in her diary, she continued to write enthusiastically and copiously to her family about her travels.



27. Sunday

Took my crucifix up before breakfast to lay it in the sacred dust of the Chamber of Osiris. Prayers. Scrambled around the rocks on a beautiful warm morning to the south. True sunday morning. With Mr. Harris all the afternoon & his black daughter — [— —] people.⁴⁴ They drank tea with us. Farewell moonlight walk. All night with my head out of window learning every line of the temples under the palms by heart.

44. Anthony Charles Harris was a British merchant based in Egypt and a collector of antiquities. Several important papyri bear his name. Selima, his adopted daughter who had been educated in England, inherited his collection of antiquities and sold it to the British Museum in 1872. She died in 1895. In her letter of January 28, 1850, Florence wrote:

Mr. Harris, to whom we had a letter, came the evening before we left, with his Abyssinian daughter, the child of an Abyssinian woman. I like her much; a really sensible nice girl—black. He is very learned and very queer. (*Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., p. 166)

28. Monday

Sailed before sunrise — Down the Cataract like a race horse — only one & a little one. Asouan to breakfast. Rode up to Mahatta — paid visits along the Cataract — like a scene in Capt. Cook. Bought my bracelets. Did not go to Elephantina. Mr. Murray in the evening.⁴⁵

29. Tuesday

Sailed before sunrise from Asouan — such a beautiful calm morning as I lay in bed with my head out of window. Wrote my account of Philae.

30. Wednesday

Kom Ombo before breakfast⁴⁶ — rather stupid — writing about Philae. Hadjar Silsileh at noon — walked along the quarries — quite warm — Mr. B. went to all on both sides⁴⁷ — Σ and I staid at home — writing till late at night.

31. Thursday

Temple at Edfoo early. Apolloinopolis Magna — only Ptolemaic — some distance from shore. Saw the potter at his wheel (Neph).⁴⁸ Got ahead at last with my Philae letter. Osiris & Scarabaeus from Edfoo.

February

1. Friday

Rose up early in the morning. Saddled up our ass. Took our young men & rode 3 miles along such a charming desert to a

45. Charles Augustus Murray was the British Consul-General in Egypt from 1846 to 1863. Florence and the Bracebridges spent time with him in Cairo, and Florence availed herself of his library. (Letter of November 29, 1849, *Letters from Egypt*, 1854 ed., pp. 26 ff.)

46. The temple of Kom Ombo dates from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods and was dedicated to the gods Haroeris (Horus the Elder) and Sobek, who is depicted as a crocodile.

47. Spanning both banks of the Nile, the site of Gebel el-Silsila comprises ancient sandstone quarries (east bank) and shrines of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties (west bank).

48. A reference to the ram-headed god Khnum (Neph in older versions), who is depicted as creating individuals on a potter's wheel. The temple of Edfu, built under the Ptolemies, was dedicated to the falcon-god Horus.