EGYPT. A SEATONIAN PRIZE POEM

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Egypt. A Seatonian prize poem by John Mason Neale

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JOHN MASON NEALE

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A Seatonian Prize Poem.

BY THE

REV. JOHN MASON NEALE, M.A.,

LATE SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

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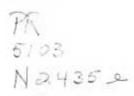
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ADVERTISEMENT.

"The Rev. Thomas Searon, M.A., late Fellow of Clare Hall, bequeathed to the University (in 1738) the rents of his Kislingbury estate, now producing clear £40, per annum, to be given yearly to that Master of Arts who shall write the best English Poem on a sacred subject. The Vice-Chancellor, the Master of Clare Hall, and the Greek Professor (who are the disposers of this premium), determine the subject, which is delivered out in January, and the Poem is to be sent to the Vice-Chancellor on or before the 29th of September following. The Poem is to be printed, and the expense deducted out of the product of the estate: the remainder is given as a reward to the composer."

Cambridge, November 2nd, 1858.

The above Premium was this year awarded to the Reverend John Mason Neale, M.A., of Trinity College.

> HENRY PHILPOTT, Vice-Chancellor. EDWARD ATKINSON, Master of Clare College. W. HEPWORTH THOMPSON, Greek Professor.



EGYPT.

1.

A MIDNIGHT, such as ne'er before Was writ on history's page; To be proclaimed from shore to shore, And sung from age to age! Along each dim historie line Of giant statues, half divine, That lead toward the midmost shrine Of Egypt's sleeping kings, A fierce, wild gleam is on the air; The tramp of gathering hosts is there; The torch glows out with murky glare, And over many a forming square Unearthly radiance flings. For not with banner, not with shout, No warrior's pomp nor pride, At midnight did the LORD go out, And Egypt's first-born died!

2.

O past the power of human speech, Past utterance of the song to teach,— How those granitic temples rise And gloom athwart the quiet skies; The moon, a pale and sickly disk, 10

20

Looks down upon each obelisk,
And throws a shadow, gaunt and dim,
O'er lines of kingly Anakim:
O'er human pomp and human pride,
And human passions deified:
All so unearthly, all so vast,
All breathing of the mighty past.
Here is the chieftain's latest bed
Of old heroic story;
The monarch, midst the monarch-dead,
Reposes in his glory.

30

3.

But not with warrior's pomp and boast They marshal now, the midnight host: Far as the plots of verdure smile Down the green valley of the Nile, No cot, but on the midnight gale Pours out its grief, lifts up its wail; None, where the hot tear is not shed Upon the loved and first-born dead. In vain, poor mother, dost thou strive To keep that little spark alive: The LORD of Life, the LORD of Death Claims, for no fault of thine, his breath. It is that Egypt may be bent Before the King omnipotent: It is that Pharaoh's chiefs may own Jehovah God, and Him alone. In vain to strive, in vain to flee Thy king's resistless Foe: 'I reck not of the LORD,' said he,

'And Israel shall not go:'

40

50

7

The nation quails before the stroke The monarch's madness dared provoke.

4.

Oh vainly warned! when Nile's great flood Rolled,-miracle of fear!-with blood: When league past league, on either shore, Came ripples, thick with clotted gore, As if in vengeance on their foes 60 The murdered innocents arose. Oh who may paint that fearful sky When clouds grew dark, and winds grew high, The day when threatened judgment came In sheets of mingled hail and flame! Upon the tender crop it drove, That sleet of solid ice; It shattered, in the idol-grove, The gods of man's device: All through the cavern's dim profound 70 Echoed that thunder's mighty sound; And pealed and pealed again its roar Through sepulchre and corridor. Oh fearful judgment from on high With unresisted sway! The Lord is fighting from on high Against the sons of clay.

5.

Day comes again: but such a morn From Eastern clouds was never born, As when, from Afric's torrid sand, The desert-swarms, a monster band, Came pouring o'er that earsed land,

80