
SKETCH OF

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Read December 9, 1889 by Jno. G. Morris.

THE purpose of our Society is not only to investigate and record recondite and little known facts relating to the history of the Germans generally in this country and in Maryland particularly, but also to exhibit the career of German individuals who have distinguished themselves in any department of human effort.

Following out this design of our Society, I will give a brief sketch of a very celebrated German Scholar, who for 60 years pursued a brilliant career, thirty of which were spent in this country. I allude to the late DR. GUSTAVUS SEYFFARTH, the learned Aegyptiologist, who died in New York, Nov. 17, 1885. He was almost as much a Marylander, as he was a Missourian or a New Yorker. He spent some time in Baltimore, where I had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with him and of enjoying his visits at my house.

He was a German by birth and education, and yet a cosmopolitan by practice and inclination. Having no family ties to keep him at home any where, he lived in this country nearly 30 years, sometimes in St. Louis, Baltimore, Boston, New York and probably at other places; wherever he could find books relating to his favorite subject, or Egyptian relics or men who pursued similar studies, there he went and stayed until he had learned every thing such sources could supply; but he finally settled in New York, where the treasures of the Astor, Lenox and other libraries, and the Abbot and other Egyptian collection were open to him.

He was born July 13th, 1796, at Uebigau, a Saxon village, near Torgau. He finished his university course with high distinction, and in early life showed a particular fondness for

the study of language. This he demonstrated when yet a young man by a latin dissertation on the popular pronunciation of Greek and Hebrew letters, which he regarded as wrong and which he sought to modify. The public defence of his theory in a Latin disputation with members of the Philosophical Faculty of Leipzig, secured for him the privilege of delivering public lectures (1823), when he was 28 years of age.

At this time already, he had mastered several oriental languages, and when Prof. Spohn died before he had completed a great work on "The language and literature of the ancient Egyptians", our Seyffarth, being the only person in Leipzig familiar with Coptic, the fundamental language of Egyptian literature, was invited by the University to complete and edit Spohn's work. He accepted this offer and his scientific career was thus impelled in a new direction.

Having examined the immense mass of Spohn's Manuscripts, he came to the conclusion that it would be impossible for him to accomplish his task, unless he previously examined all the Egyptian museums in Europe and copied the principal papyri and inscriptions. Accordingly, during the years 1826—1828, he visited the public and private collections of Aegyptian antiquities of 16 different cities of Europe and took copies of all important inscriptions, which now constitute his "Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca Manuscripta," a work of 15 vols. in royal folio, and which is by his will, the property of the New York Historical Society. The Saxon Government aided him by a donation of 400 Thalers.

In 1856 he came to the United States and accepted a professorship of Archaeology and Cognate Sciences, in the Lutheran Concordia Collegium at St. Louis, Mo. Here he gave gratuitous instruction for several years. In 1859, he moved to New York, where the treasures of the Astor library gave him ample opportunity for pursuing his favorite studies. His writings since 1821, treat of the following subjects, Egyptian Philology and Palaeography: the ancient astronomy of the Aegyptians, Greek, Romans and Cypriotes, universal history and chronology, especially of the old and new testaments, of the Egyptians, Greeks, Babylonians, Chinese, &c., Mythology, ancient Geography, Apologetics, &c.

The titles of his books and dissertations in German, Latin, English and French, amount to 127, 55 of which were first published in this country. Besides these, there are 31 voluminous manuscripts. — He was a very diligent student and untiring investigator, who for months together devoted 12 to 16 hours a day to his work. None but an enthusiastic German would ever have the patience to persevere in one branch of learning to this extent. But he did it and never grew weary of it. His severe studies did not seem to injure his health, for he lived to be 90 years of age.

He made himself so familiar with the topography of Egypt that he seemed to know the precise and relative position of every ruin, obelisk, pyramid, temple and of every thing else that is ancient in that wonderful country. He knew the measurement of every structure, its internal and external ornamentation, its inscriptions, sculpture and exact conformation, and yet he told me himself, that he had never visited Egypt, but he read every thing ever written upon the subject, and he had a wonderful memory.

The great Egyptologists, as Champollion, Lepsius, Ebers, Brugsch, Bunsen and others, violently opposed Seyffarth's theory and a furious controversy ensued, the details of which would neither be edifying or interesting to us. To some extent it was acrimonious and undignified.

Of Champollion's theory of the hieratic writing of the ancient Egyptians, Seyffarth says, it has given rise to numberless absurdities. Brugsch-Bey, for instance, (by the way, Brugsch was in this country in '76 (?), when I had the pleasure of meeting him) discovered that the Egyptians were fond of lager beer, and that some thousands of years B. C., breweries existed in Egypt. Ebers, too, learned, that "one gallon of lager beer" constituted a dose for a sick Egyptian.

Many important Egyptian antiquities were brought to light by Dr. Seyffarth. Among them are:

1. The origin of Manetho's Egyptian History, written in hieratic characters.

This he was enabled to do by examining a huge box, preserved in the Egyptian museum of Turin, which contained

at least half a million of papyrus fragments, of which the largest were three inches long. He spent six weeks in putting them together, and obtained a papyrus eight feet long and one foot broad, and he found that it corresponds in all respects to the Greek Manetho, as preserved by Josephus, Julius Africanus, Eisenbein and others. He does not hesitate to state that this papyrus scroll was written by Manetho himself. It is not perfect, but enough remains to show its great importance in Egyptian Archaeology.

The Doctor cannot help giving a severe blow to his rival Champollion, in saying, that the same box had been examined two years before by Champollion and having selected one fragment, he ordered the custos to put the rest of it in the privy. "So we owe to Champollion's researches the loss of the most important relic of Egyptian Antiquity."

2. There are more than thirty other discoveries which the Doctor made, or hieroglyphics which he decyphered, which were unknown to the learned world before. Many of these are very interesting to the Egyptologist and have brought much credit to the investigator.

It was he, who was the only man in this country, who could read the inscriptions on the obelisk, which was erected in New York Central Park, on January 23, 1880. It was the gift of the viceroy of Egypt and will always constitute the most interesting object in those grounds. It is said that our climate is destructive to the material, although, I believe, that measures have been taken to prevent it. It represents according to Seyffarth, the names of Thutmor III, and of Ramses II, who lived two hundred years later. The former was the noted Pharaoh, who perished while pursuing the Israelites in the Red Sea, in 1866 before Christ. He estimates this obelisk to be about 3750 years old, and asks: "Is it not a singular act of Providence that, after so long a time, the name of a hero of a tragedy unparalleled in history, has come to light?"

The Doctor has also settled the chronology of many events in Egyptian and Sacred history, and therein has displayed a wealth of astronomical and historical knowledge that is simply amazing.

He bequeathed most, if not all, of his literary treasures to the New York Historical Society; it consists of more than 60 printed volumes, with the addition of almost equally numerous manuscripts. A great dictionary of the Egyptian hieroglyphical language, absorbed the energies of the later portion of his life. During those years, an aged man, with a deep disfiguring scar in his cheek, was sometimes to be met at twilight, walking for recreation to Central Park. He lived near by and the exercise only followed a day's severe labor in his study and the man who spent from 13 to 15 hours a day in literary labor, needed recreation in the evening. Three years before his death, he delivered a lecture on the subject of the inscriptions on the obelisk in Central Park, and he was so perfectly absorbed in his theme, that he continued his lecture over several hours, for the stopping of his watch misled him as to the flight of time. He was then 86 years of age, but this mental effort was followed by so serious an illness that it was thought he would die, but he held out nearly four years longer. "No man was ever so thoroughly absorbed by the fascination of penetrating by slow degrees the long sealed product of high civilisation and sacerdotal culture preserved from the days of Menes and Atholis."

The earliest of his productions is the *Rudimenta Hieroglyphica*, published in Leipzig in 1826, when he was 30 years of age, but he had previously edited the works of Spohn; and thus through a period of more than 60 years, he pursued his favorite theme with unabated industry. He was compelled to maintain his ground against the bitter opposition of three generations of Egyptologists, but he also had many able vindicators and defenders.

Of course, he committed some errors, but as soon as he became conscious of them, he abandoned and corrected them. After a Professorship of 32 years duration at Leipzig, he came to this country. He had issued during that period an average of one publication annually on Egyptian literature. The reason of his leaving his native country, is no where stated.

As I stated before, he lectured in Concordia College, St. Louis. In a subsequent unsuccessful experiment to establish

a Lutheran Seminary, at Danville, N. Y., he lost some thousand dollars, and then settled in the city of New York. I said that a great number of volumes remain in manuscript, which will probably never be published. Many of his recently published works first appeared in different periodicals, or were printed by scientific associations. Like those of earlier date, they are in vehement conflict with accepted theories. He was almost without sympathy in his tremendous struggle, but he was defended and respected by such men as Prof. Uhlemann of Göttingen and Profs. Wuttke and Delitzsch of Leipzig. Many others have revered him as a man of profound philological learning.

He claims to have discovered the principle of syllabic hieroglyphs, without which, he maintains, no adequate interpretation is possible. Champollion and his school held, that Egyptian literature originated from ideologic writing and consists partly of phonetic figures and partly of phonetic images, what the difference really is, I am not competent to determine, but it appears, that Seyffarth's system has triumphed, and Champollion's grammar is out of date.

I thought, that this brief sketch of an eminent German, who spent nearly 30 years of his life in this country, who sojourned in Baltimore for some time, and was personally known to some of us, was proper to be brought before this Society.

He died in 1886, in New York, in his 90th year, and as far as I know, has left no successor who will equal him in the breadth of his general attainments and in the profundity of his Egyptiological knowledge.

We have eminent scholars among us who are pursuing oriental studies, but they confine their researches to the archaeology of the holy land and Assyria, and not to Egypt as Dr. Seyffarth did. I know but one man who is making this a specialty, and he is a young Lutheran minister in New York, named Mohldehnke, who has already written several pamphlets upon the subject, but who, I presume, has neither the time nor opportunity to prosecute this work.

