

Amasis. — 13. The last national king who ruled Egypt was Amasis, a usurper who, to justify his power, married a princess of the royal house. The writings of Herodotus show that Amasis was witty as well as clever.

His obscure birth, his irregular life until he assumed kingly power, estranged from him part of the nation. Amasis answered those who upbraided him for his low origin by a species of apologue : he ordered a golden basin, in which he and his guests had previously washed their feet at table, to be melted. From this metal he ordered a statue of a god to be cast and exposed for public worship. This god received the adoration of all. Amasis then said to the Egyptians : "Behold the symbol of my life, — this vile basin turned into the statue of a god is now the object of your worship. Although I formerly belonged to the lowest class, to-day I am at your head. I have then the right to look for respect and obedience from you."

The wise rule of Amasis soon won him all hearts. This clever king drew a great number of Greeks into Egypt. Never had the country been more prosperous.

Foreign rule. — 14. Unhappily the wealth of the country could not replace bravery. In consequence, the nation became weak and defenceless. On the other hand, the Persian Empire, at this period, had grown strong in Asia. Within six months after the death of Amasis, the Persians, headed by Cambyses, invaded Egypt which, being powerless to resist, became a province of the Persian Empire (525).

The Egyptians tried several times to free themselves, and succeeded in obtaining their national independence for sixty years, (506-445) during which time followed the last three national dynasties, the twenty-eighth, the twenty-ninth, and the thirtieth. Having fallen again under the Persian yoke, Egypt was conquered in 342 by Alexander the Great, then by the Greeks, and finally in 30 B. C., by the Romans. The Arabs and Turks, in turn, took possession of it. For the last twenty-four centuries, Egypt, once so glorious, has been under foreign rule.