

to Egypt, and the surrounding nations, that I would trace the invention of a phonetic language, or language communicating by arbitrary sounds. There are circumstances, it seems to me, which must naturally have tended to retard the progress of picture writing in these countries, and to call forth attempts to communicate by means of written characters sounds themselves. A great part of the peculiarities of the ancient civilization of Egypt, are unquestionably owing to the very peculiar nature of the country itself—a long fertile valley, flooded every year by a regular inundation, having the Nile and various canals open at other seasons, and bordered throughout by ranges of granitic mountains. These mountains furnished them with materials for all their great structures. Vast masses of granite were easily lifted from their beds, and transported to every part of the land by water. Vast and imperishable structures were thus raised with comparative ease, and they were accordingly erected to an extent which has astonished mankind for thousands of years. The effects produced by the constant view of these enormous and imperishable monuments, on the minds of the Egyptians, could not fail to be considerable. The very contemplation of these objects gave a sort of vastness and immobility to their ideas and character. An instance may explain my meaning.

Let us suppose that a man ignorant of what we reckon the first principles of sculpture, sets about forming an image in stone, of some human form; he will infallibly give to it the stiffest attitudes, because that it is the easiest both in conception and execution. The body will be erect, the limbs rigid, the arms extended along the sides, and probably the back resting on a mass of the ori-

ginal stone. Now this is the precise attitude of all the Egyptian statues. They are acknowledged to have a very striking beauty—a beauty peculiar to themselves, arising from the perfection of the execution, and the air of repose that is breathed over them; but they have all this one attitude. I think we cannot explain this circumstance otherwise than by considering the influence which the principle of imitation must have acquired from the imperishable nature of first attempts in statuary, and these consequently serving as models on which all subsequent essays were to be moulded, as the cause producing it. The attitude in which their ancient heroes and demigods appeared to them in their magnificent temples, would become sacred to their eyes, and would be the fashion in which all their successors would desire to be exhibited. This circumstance is the more remarkable, that according to Winkelman, an admirable judge, their sculptures of inferior animals are not only beautiful, but full of life and energy.

Now I think that it is almost certain that the same fixity of character which distinguished their sculpture, must have been imparted from similar causes, to their picture, or symbolic writing, and that their system would consequently be but little varied in its essential parts from the original plan of giving actual and recognizable representations of visible objects. This conjecture is proved to be in some measure correct, by the signs that actually occur in Egyptian hieroglyphics, in which birds eyes, serpents, &c. make up a large portion of the figures covering the surface. Now this is obviously a system incapable of giving any thing like free expression to thought. The principle of the Chinese written language of symbols, and of all such hypothetical languages