

## THE ELOQUENT PEASANT

This long work is preserved in four papyrus copies, all dating from the Middle Kingdom. The individual copies are incomplete, but together they yield the full text, which comprises 430 lines. The three principal copies are P. Berlin 3023 (B1), P. Berlin 3025 (B2), and P. Berlin 10499 (R); the fourth is P. Butler 527 = P. British Museum 10274.

The text consists of a narrative frame and nine poetic speeches. It is both a serious disquisition on the need for justice, and a parable on the utility of fine speech. The connection between the two themes is achieved by means of an ironic device in the narrative frame: after the peasant has been robbed and has laid his complaint before the magistrate in a stirring plea, the latter is so delighted with this unlearned man's eloquence that he reports it to the king; and on the king's orders the magistrate goads the peasant to continue pleading until the poor man is completely exhausted. Only then does he receive justice and ample rewards.

The tension between the studied silence of the magistrate and the increasingly despairing speeches of the peasant is the operative principle that moves the action forward. And the mixture of seriousness and irony, the intertwining of a plea for justice with a demonstration of the value of rhetoric, is the very essence of the work.

Publication: F. Vogelsang and A. H. Gardiner, *Die Klagen des Bauern*, Literarische Texte des Mittleren Reiches, I (Berlin, 1908). F. Vogelsang, *Kommentar zu den Klagen des Bauern*, Untersuchungen, 6 (Leipzig, 1913; reprint, Hildesheim, 1964).

Excerpts: de Buck, *Readingbook*, pp. 88-99. Sethe, *Lesestücke*, pp. 17-25. *Idem*, *Erl.*, pp. 21-32.

Translation: A. H. Gardiner, *JEA*, 9 (1923), 5-25. Erman, *Literature*, pp. 116-131. F. Lexa, *Arch. Or.*, 7 (1935), 372-383. Lefebvre, *Romans*, pp. 41-69. J. A. Wilson in *ANET*, pp. 407-410 (excerpts). Bissing, *Lebensweisheit*, pp. 155-170.

Comments: F. Lexa, *RT*, 34 (1912), 218-231. A. H. Gardiner, *PSBA*, 35 (1913), 264-276. E. Suys, *Étude sur le conte du fellah plaideur*

(Rome, 1933). A. M. Blackman, *JEA*, 20 (1934), 218-219. S. Herrmann, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 79-98. *Idem*, *ZAS*, 80 (1955), 34-39, and *ZAS*, 82 (1958), 55-57. G. Lanczkowski, *Altägyptischer Prophetismus* (Wiesbaden, 1960).

(R1) There was a man named Khun-Anup, a peasant of Salt-Field.<sup>1</sup> He had a wife whose name was [Ma]rye. This peasant said to his wife: "Look here, I am going down to Egypt to bring food from there for my children. Go, measure for me the barley which is in the barn, what is left of [last year's] barley." Then she measured for him [twenty-six] gallons of barley. (5) This peasant said to his wife: "Look, you have twenty gallons of barley as food for you and your children. Now make for me these six gallons of barley into bread and beer for every day in which [I shall travel]."

This peasant went down to Egypt. He had loaded his donkeys with rushes, *rdmt*-grass, (10) natron, salt, sticks of ---, staves from Cattle-Country,<sup>2</sup> leopard skins, (15) wolf skins, *ns3*-plants, *nw*-stones, *tnm*-plants, *hprwr*-plants, (20) *s3hwt*, *s3skwt*, *miswt*-plants, *snt*-stones, *'b3w*-stones, (25) *ibs3*-plants, *inbi*-plants, pigeons, *n'rw*-birds, *wgs*-birds, (30) *wbn*-plants, *tbsw*-plants, *gnnt*, earth-hair, and *inst*; (35) in sum, all the good products of Salt-Field. This peasant went south toward Hnes.<sup>3</sup> He arrived in the district of Perfefi, north of Medenyt. There he met a man standing on the riverbank whose name was Nemtynakht.<sup>4</sup> He was the son of a man (40) named Isri and a subordinate of the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru.

This Nemtynakht said, when he saw this peasant's donkeys which tempted his heart: "If only I had a potent divine image through which I could seize this peasant's goods!" Now the house of this Nemtynakht was at the beginning (45) of a path<sup>5</sup> which was narrow, not so wide as to exceed the width of a shawl. And one side of it was under water, the other under barley. This Nemtynakht said to his servant: "Go, bring me a sheet from my house." It was brought to him straightway. He spread it out on the beginning of the path, (50) so that its fringe touched the water, its hem the barley.

Now this peasant came along the public road. (Bl, 1) Then this Nemtynakht said: "Be careful, peasant; don't step on my clothes! This peasant said: "I'll do as you wish, my course is a good one." So he went up higher. This Nemtynakht said: (5) "Will you have my barley for a path?" This peasant said: "My course is a good one. The riverbank is steep and our way is under barley, for you block the path with your clothes. Will you then not let us pass on the road?"

Just then one of the donkeys filled (10) its mouth with a wisp of barley. This Nemtynakht said: "Now I shall seize your donkey, peasant, for eating my barley. It shall tread out grain for its offense!" This peasant said: "My course is a good one. Only one (wisp) is destroyed. Could I buy my donkey for its value, if you seize it (15) for filling its mouth with a wisp of barley?"<sup>6</sup> But I know the lord of this domain; it belongs to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru. He punishes every robber in this whole land. Shall I be robbed in his domain?" This Nemtynakht said: "Is this the saying people say: (20) 'A poor man's name is pronounced for his master's sake.' It is I who speak to you, and you invoke the high steward!"

Then he took a stick of green tamarisk to him and thrashed all his limbs with it, seized his donkeys, drove them to his domain. Then this peasant (25) wept very loudly for the pain of that which was done to him. This Nemtynakht said: "Don't raise your voice, peasant. Look, you are bound for the abode of the Lord of Silence!"<sup>7</sup> This peasant said: "You beat me, you steal my goods, and now you take the complaint from my mouth! O Lord of Silence, give me back (30) my things, so that I can stop crying to your dreadedness!"<sup>8</sup>

This peasant spent the time of ten days appealing to this Nemtynakht who paid no attention to it. So this peasant proceeded southward to Hnes, in order to appeal to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru. He found him coming out of the door (35) of his house, to go down to his courthouse barge. This peasant said: "May I be allowed to acquaint you with this complaint? Might a servant of your choice be sent to me, through whom I could inform you of it?" So the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, (40) sent a servant of his choice ahead of him, and this peasant informed him of the matter in all its aspects.

Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, denounced this Nemtynakht to the magistrates who were with him. Then they said to him: "Surely it is a peasant of his who has gone to someone else beside him. (45) That is what they do to peasants of theirs who go to others beside them.<sup>9</sup> That is what they do. Is there cause for punishing this Nemtynakht for a trifle of natron and a trifle of salt? If he is ordered to replace it, he will replace it." Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, (50) fell silent. He did not reply to these magistrates, nor did he reply to this peasant.

## First Petition

Now this peasant came to appeal to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru. He said: "O high steward, my lord, greatest of the great, leader of all!

When you go down to the sea of (55) justice  
 And sail on it with a fair wind,<sup>10</sup>  
 No squall shall strip away your sail,  
 Nor will your boat be idle.  
 No accident will affect your mast,  
 Your yards will not break.  
 You will not founder when you touch land,  
 No flood will carry you away.  
 You will not taste the river's (60) evils,  
 You will not see a frightened face.  
 Fish will come darting to you,  
 Fatted fowl surround you.  
 For you are father to the orphan,  
 Husband to the widow,  
 Brother to the rejected woman,  
 Apron to the motherless.

Let me make your name in (65) this land according to all the good rules:<sup>11</sup>

Leader free of greed,  
 Great man free of baseness,  
 Destroyer of falsehood,  
 Creator of rightness,  
 Who comes at the voice of the caller!  
 When I speak, may you hear!  
 Do justice, O praised one,  
 Who is praised by the praised;  
 Remove (70) my grief, I am burdened,  
 Examine me, I am in need!"

Now this peasant made this speech in the time of the majesty of King Nebkaure, the justified. Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, went before his majesty and said: "My lord, (75) I have found one among those peasants whose speech is truly beautiful. Robbed of his goods by a man who is in my service, he has come to petition me about it." Said his majesty: "As truly as you wish to see me

in health, you shall detain him here, without answering whatever he says. In order to keep him (80) talking, be silent. Then have it brought to us in writing, that we may hear it. But provide for his wife and his children. For one of those peasants comes here (only) just before his house is empty. Provide also for this peasant himself. You shall let food be given him without letting him know that it is you who gives it to him."

So they gave him ten loaves of bread and two jugs of beer (85) every day. It was the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, who gave it. He gave it to a friend of his, and he gave it to him. Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, wrote to the mayor of Salt-Field about providing food for this peasant's wife, a total of three bushels of grain every day.

### Second Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a second time. He said: "O high steward, my lord, greatest of the great, richest of the rich, truly greater than his great ones, richer than his (90) rich ones!

Rudder of heaven, beam of earth,  
Plumb-line that carries the weight!  
Rudder, drift not,  
Beam, tilt not,  
Plumb-line, swing not awry!

A great lord taking a share of that which is (now) ownerless; stealing from a lonely man? Your portion is in your house: a jug of beer and three loaves. What is that you expend to satisfy your (95) clients? A mortal man dies along with his underlings; shall you be a man of eternity?

Is it not wrong, a balance that tilts,  
A plummet that strays,  
The straight becoming crooked?  
Lo, justice flees from you,  
Expelled from its seat!  
The magistrates do wrong,  
Right-dealing is bent sideways,  
The judges snatch what has been stolen.  
He who trims a matter's rightness (100) makes it swing awry:  
The breath-giver chokes him who is down,

He who should refresh makes pant.  
 The arbitrator is a robber,  
 The remover of need orders its creation.  
 The town is a floodwater,  
 The punisher of evil commits crimes!"

Said the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru: "Are your belongings a greater concern to you than that my servant might seize you?"<sup>12</sup>  
 This peasant said:

"The measurer of (105) grain-heaps trims for himself,  
 He who fills for another shaves the other's share;  
 He who should rule by law commands theft,  
 Who then will punish crime?  
 The straightener of another's crookedness  
 Supports another's crime.  
 Do you find here something for you?  
 Redress is short, misfortune long,  
 A good deed is remembered.  
 This is the precept:  
 Do to the doer (110) to make him do.<sup>13</sup>  
 It is thanking a man for what he does,  
 Parrying a blow before it strikes,  
 Giving a commission to one who is skillful.

Oh for a moment of destruction, havoc in your vineyard, loss among  
 your birds, damage to your water birds!

A man who saw has turned blind,  
 A hearer deaf,  
 A leader now leads astray!

(115) . . . . . You are strong and mighty. Your arm is active, your heart greedy, mercy has passed you by. How miserable is the wretch whom you have destroyed! You are like a messenger of the Crocodile; you surpass (120) the Lady of Pestilence!<sup>14</sup> If you have nothing, she has nothing. If there's nothing against her, there's nothing against you. If you don't act, she does not act. The wealthy should be merciful; violence is for the criminal; robbing suits him who has nothing. The stealing done by the robber is the misdeed of one who is poor.<sup>15</sup> One can't reproach him; he merely seeks for himself. But you are sated (125) with your bread, drunken with your beer, rich in all kinds of [treasures].

Though the face of the steersman is forward, the boat drifts as it pleases. Though the king is in the palace, though the rudder is in your hand, wrong is done around you. Long is my plea, heavy my task. "What is the matter with him?" people ask.

Be a shelter, (130) make safe your shore,  
 See how your quay is infested with crocodiles!  
 Straighten your tongue, let it not stray,  
 A serpent is this limb of man.  
 Don't tell lies, warn the magistrates,  
 Greasy baskets are the judges,  
 Telling lies is their herbage,  
 It weighs lightly on them.  
 Knower of (135) all men's ways:  
 Do you ignore my case?  
 Savior from all water's harm:  
 See I have a course without a ship!  
 Guider to port of all who founder:  
 Rescue the drowning!  
 . . . . ."

### Third Petition

Then this peasant came to petition him a third time; he said:

(14) "High steward, my lord,  
 You are Re, lord of sky, with your courtiers,  
 Men's sustenance is from you as from the flood,  
 You are Hapy who makes green the fields,  
 Revives the wastelands.  
 Punish the robber, save the sufferer,  
 Be not (145) a flood against the pleader!  
 Heed eternity's coming,  
 Desire to last, as is said:  
 Doing justice is breath for the nose.  
 Punish him who should be punished,  
 And none will equal your rectitude.  
 Does the hand-balance deflect?  
 Does the stand-balance tilt?  
 Does Thoth (150) show favor  
 So that you may do wrong?  
 Be the equal of these three:

If the three show favor,  
 Then may you show favor!  
 Answer not good with evil,  
 Put not one thing in place of another!

My speech grows more than *smyt*-weed, to assault<sup>16</sup> the smell  
 with its answers. Misfortune pours water (155) till cloth will grow!  
 Three times now to make him act!<sup>17</sup>

By the sail-wind should you steer,  
 Control the waves to sail aright;  
 Guard from landing by the helm-rope,  
 Earth's rightness lies in justice!  
 Speak not falsely—you are great,  
 Act not lightly—(160) you are weighty;  
 Speak not falsely—you are the balance,  
 Do not swerve—you are the norm!  
 You are one with the balance,  
 If it tilts you may tilt.  
 Do not drift, steer, hold the helm-rope!  
 Rob not, act against the robber,  
 (165) Not great is one who is great in greed.  
 Your tongue is the plummet,  
 Your heart the weight,  
 Your two lips are its arms.  
 If you avert your face from violence,  
 Who then shall punish wrongdoing?  
 Lo, you are a wretch of a washerman,  
 A greedy one who harms (170) a friend,  
 One who forsakes his friend for his client,  
 His brother is he who comes with gifts.  
 Lo, you are a ferryman who ferries him who pays,  
 A straight one whose straightness is splintered,  
 A storekeeper who does not let a poor man pass,  
 Lo, you are (175) a hawk to the little people,  
 One who lives on the poorest of the birds.  
 Lo, you are a butcher whose joy is slaughter,  
 The carnage is nothing to him.  
 You are a herdsman . . . . .

. . . . .



(180) Hearer, you hear not! Why do you not hear? Now I have subdued the savage; the crocodile retreats! What is your gain? When the secret of truth is found, falsehood is thrown on its back on the ground. Trust not the morrow before it has come; none knows the trouble in it."<sup>18</sup>

Now this peasant had made this speech (185) to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, at the entrance to the courthouse. Then he had two guards go to him with whips, and they thrashed all his limbs.

This peasant said: "The son of Meru goes on erring. His face is blind to what he sees, deaf to what he hears; his heart strays from what is recalled to him.

You are like a town<sup>19</sup> (190) without a mayor,  
Like a troop without a leader,  
Like a ship without a captain,  
A company without a chief.  
You are a sheriff who steals,  
A mayor who pockets,  
A district prosecutor of crime  
Who is the model for the (evil)-doer!"

#### Fourth Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a fourth time. Finding him (195) coming out of the gate of the temple of Harsaphes, he said: "O praised one, may Harsaphes praise you, from whose temple you have come!

Goodness is destroyed, none adhere to it,  
To fling falsehood's back to the ground.  
If the ferry is grounded, wherewith does one cross? . . . . .

Is crossing (200) the river on sandals a good crossing? No! Who now sleeps till daybreak? Gone is walking by night, travel by day, and letting a man defend his own good cause. But it is no use to tell you this; mercy has passed you by. How miserable is the wretch (205) whom you have destroyed!

Lo, you are a hunter who takes his fill,<sup>20</sup>  
Bent on doing what he pleases;  
Spearing hippopotami, shooting bulls,  
Catching fish, snaring birds.  
(But) none quick to speak is free from haste,

None light of heart is weighty in conduct.  
 Be patient (210) so as to learn justice,  
 Restrain your [‘anger’] for the good of the humble seeker.<sup>21</sup>  
 No hasty man attains excellence,  
 No impatient man is leaned upon.

Let the eyes see, let the heart take notice. Be not harsh in your power, lest trouble befall you. (215) Pass over a matter, it becomes two. He who eats tastes; one addressed answers. It is the sleeper who sees the dream; and a judge who deserves punishment is a model for the (evil)doer. Fool, you are attacked! Ignorant man, you are (220) questioned! Spouter of water, you are attained!

Steersman, let not drift your boat,  
 Life-sustainer, let not die,  
 Provider, let not perish,<sup>22</sup>  
 Shade, let one not dry out,<sup>23</sup>  
 Shelter, let not the crocodile snatch!  
 The fourth time I petition you! (225) Shall I go on all day?”

#### Fifth Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a fifth time; he said:

“O high steward, my lord! The fisher of *hwdw*-fish ———, the ——— slays the *iy*-fish; the spearer of fish pierces the ‘*wbb*-fish; the *d3bhꜣw*-fisher (230) attacks the *p’kr*-fish; and the catcher of *wꜣ*-fish ravages the river.<sup>24</sup> Now you are like them! Rob not a poor man of his goods, a humble man whom you know! Breath to the poor are his belongings; he who takes them stops up his nose. It is to hear cases that you were installed, to judge between two, (235) to punish the robber. But what you do is to uphold the thief! One puts one’s trust in you, but you have become a transgressor! You were placed as a dam for the poor lest he drown, but you have become a swift current to him!

#### Sixth Petition

Now this peasant came (240) to petition him a sixth time; he said:  
 “O high steward, my lord!<sup>25</sup>

He who lessens falsehood fosters truth,  
 He who fosters the good reduces (evil),  
 As satiety’s coming removes hunger,

Clothing removes nakedness;  
 As the sky is serene after a (245) storm,  
 Warming all who shiver;  
 As fire cooks what is raw,  
 As water quenches thirst.  
 Now see for yourself:  
 The arbitrator is a robber,  
 The peacemaker makes grief,  
 He who should soothe (250) makes sore.  
 But he who cheats diminishes justice!  
 Rightly filled justice neither falls short nor brims over.

If you acquire, give to your fellow; gobbling up is dishonest.  
 But my grief will lead to (255) parting; my accusation brings departure.  
 The heart's intent cannot be known. Don't delay! Act on the charge!  
 If you sever, who shall join? The sounding pole is in your hand;  
 sound! The water is shallow!<sup>26</sup> If the boat enters and is grounded, its  
 cargo perishes (260) on the shore.

You are learned, skilled, accomplished,  
 But not in order to plunder!  
 You should be the model for all men,  
 But your affairs are crooked!  
 The standard for all men cheats the whole land!  
 The vintner of evil waters his plot with crimes,  
 Until his plot sprouts (265) falsehood,  
 His estate flows with crimes!"

#### Seventh Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a seventh time; he said:  
 "O high steward, my lord!

You are the whole land's rudder,  
 The land sails by your bidding;  
 You are the peer of Thoth,  
 The judge who is not partial.

My lord, be patient, so that a man may invoke you (270) about  
 his rightful cause. Don't be angry; it is not for you. The long-faced  
 becomes short-tempered. Don't brood on what has not yet come, nor  
 rejoice at what has not yet happened. The patient man prolongs  
 friendship; he who destroys a case will not be trusted.<sup>27</sup> If law is

laid waste and order destroyed, no poor man can (275) survive: when he is robbed, justice does not address him.

My body was full, my heart burdened. Now therefore it has come from my body. As a dam is breached and water escapes, so my mouth opened to speak. I plied my sounding pole, I bailed out my water; I have emptied what was in my body; I have washed my soiled linen. (280) My speech is done. My grief is all before you. What do you want? But your laziness leads you astray; your greed makes you dumb; your gluttony makes enemies for you. But will you find another peasant like me? Is there an idler at whose house door a petitioner will stand?

(285) There is no silent man whom you gave speech,  
 No sleeper whom you have wakened,  
 None downcast whom you have roused,  
 None whose shut mouth you have opened,  
 None ignorant whom you gave knowledge,  
 None foolish whom you have taught.  
 (Yet) magistrates are dispellers of evil,  
 Masters of the good,  
 Craftsmen who create what is,  
 Joiners of the severed head!"

#### Eighth Petition

Now this peasant (290) came to petition him an eighth time; he said: "O high steward, my lord! Men fall low through greed. The rapacious man lacks success; his success is loss. Though you are greedy it does nothing for you. Though you steal you do not profit. Let a man defend his rightful cause!

Your portion is in your house; your belly is full. The grain-bin brims over; shake it, (295) its overflow spoils on the ground. Thief, robber, plunderer! Magistrates are appointed to suppress crime. Magistrates are shelters against the aggressor. Magistrates are appointed to fight falsehood!

No fear of you makes me petition you; you do not know my heart. A humble man who comes back to reproach you is not afraid of him with whom he pleads. (300) The like of him will not be brought you from the street!

You have your plot of ground in the country, your estate in the district, your income in the storehouse. Yet the magistrates give to you and you take! Are you then a robber? Does one give to you and the troop with you at the division of plots?

Do justice for the Lord of Justice  
 The justice of whose justice is reall  
 (305) Pen, papyrus, palette of Thoth,  
 Keep away from wrongdoing!  
 When goodness is good it is truly good,  
 For justice is for eternity:  
 It enters the graveyard with its doer.  
 When he is buried and earth enfolds him,  
 His name (310) does not pass from the earth;  
 He is remembered because of goodness,  
 That is the rule of god's command.

The hand-balance—it tilts not; the stand-balance—it leans not to one side. Whether I come, whether another comes, speak! (315) Do not answer with the answer of silence! Do not attack one who does not attack you. You have no pity, you are not troubled, you are not disturbed! You do not repay my good speech which comes from the mouth of Re himself!

Speak justice, do justice,  
 For it is mighty;  
 It is great, it endures,  
 Its worth is tried,<sup>28</sup>  
 It leads one to reveredness.

Does the hand-balance tilt? Then it is its scales which carry things. The standard has no fault. Crime does not attain its goal; he who is helpful<sup>29</sup> reaches land."

#### Ninth Petition

(B2, 91) Now this peasant came to petition him a ninth time; he said: "O high steward, my lord! The tongue is men's stand-balance. It is the balance that detects deficiency. Punish him who should be punished, and <none> shall equal your rectitude. (95) --- . . . . . When falsehood walks it goes astray. It does not cross in the ferry; it does not 'progress'. (100) He who is enriched by it has no children, has no heirs on earth. He who sails with it does not reach land; his boat does not moor at its landing place.

Be not heavy, nor yet light,  
 Do not tarry, nor yet hurry,  
 Be not partial, nor listen to (105) desire.

Do not avert your face from one you know,  
 Be not blind to one you have seen,  
 Do not rebuff one who beseeches you.  
 Abandon this slackness,  
 Let your speech be heard.  
 Act for him who would act for you,  
 Do not listen to everyone,  
 Summon a man to his rightful cause!

A sluggard has no yesterday;<sup>30</sup> (110) one deaf to justice has no friend; the greedy has no holiday. When the accuser is a wretch, and the wretch becomes a pleader, his opponent is a killer. Here I have been pleading with you, and you have not listened to it. I shall go and plead (115) about you to Anubis!"

#### Conclusion

Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, sent two guards to bring him back. Then this peasant was fearful, thinking it was done so as to punish him for this speech he had made. This peasant said: "A thirsty man's approach to water, an infant's mouth (120) reaching for milk, thus is a longed-for death seen coming, thus does his death arrive at last." Said the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru: "Don't be afraid, peasant; be ready to deal with me!" Said this peasant: (125) "By my life! Shall I eat your bread and drink your beer forever?" Said the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru: "Now wait here and hear your petitions!" Then he had them read from a new papyrus roll, each petition in its turn. (130) The high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, presented them to the majesty of King Nebkaure, the justified. They pleased his majesty's heart more than anything in the whole land. His majesty said: "Give judgment yourself, son of Meru!"

Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, sent two guards [to bring Nemtynakht]. (135) He was brought and a report was made of [all his property] ----- his wheat, his barley, his donkeys, ---, his pigs, his small cattle -----, --- of this Nemtynakht [was given] to this peasant -----.

*Colophon:* It is finished -----.

#### NOTES

1. The Wadi Natrun.
2. The Farafra Oasis.

3. Heracleopolis Magna (Ahnas), the metropolis of the twentieth nome of Upper Egypt and the capital of the Ninth/Tenth Dynasty.

4. So rather than Thutnakht, as shown by O. Berlev, *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 1 (107) (1969), 3-30 (pointed out to me by K. Baer).

5. *Sms-ts n rs-wst* was rendered "riverside path" by Gardiner, but this is a rather free rendering which hardly accounts for the term or for the situation. The text says that the house was *hr sms-ts*, but it could not have stood *on* the path. The implied situation is that the house stood at the side of a narrow path which at this point merged with the "public road" on which the peasant was approaching. Hence I take *sms-ts* to mean the "beginning", or similar, of the path.

6. The meaning of the passage was established by E. Wente in *JNES*, 24 (1965), 105-109, where he rendered: "Only one (wisp) has been destroyed. It is for its (i.e., the wisp's) price that I will buy back my donkey if you seize possession of it for a (mere) filling of its mouth with a wisp of Upper Egyptian barley," and explained it as a quick-witted response. I differ only in taking it as a rhetorical question rather than an assertion.

7. The god Osiris, who had a sanctuary in the neighborhood.

8. Among the epithets of Osiris are "lord of fear," "lord of awe."

9. The magistrates exculpate Nemtynakht by surmising that the peasant was a serf of his who had tried to do business with another landlord and was being punished for it.

10. Wordplay on *ms't*, "justice" and *ms'w*, "fair wind." The poetic speeches contain numerous wordplays and assonances. Where possible I have tried to imitate them, as in rendering *m twt tyt m ht-k* as "no accident will affect your mast," rather than "no mishap will befall your mast," or the like.

11. As Ranke explained in *ZAS*, 79 (1954), 72, the peasant makes for the high steward a titulary of five great names in analogy with the five great names of the royal titulary.

12. In order to goad the peasant to further speeches, the high steward threatens him with a beating.

13. The peasant quotes a proverb that embodies the *do ut des* principle.

14. The goddess Sakhmet.

15. I emend *twty* to *nty*.

16. *Dml* here, as in the *Dispute between a Man and His Ba*, line 150, cannot mean "cling to," but rather "press against," "attack."

17. I.e., this is the peasant's third plea.

18. A proverb similar to *Ptahhotep*, line 343: "Though one plans the morrow one knows not what will be."

19. Reading *mf* instead of *m*; the speeches of the peasant by and large make a clear distinction between the two. The high steward is *identified* with individual characters or things (steersman, balance, etc.) and is *likened* to larger entities, such as a troop without leader, etc.

20. Literally, "washes his heart." In *Ptahhotep*, lines 79 and 152, *t'-lb* is an "outburst of anger." See there n. 9.

21. *Bss grw*, "he who enters humbly." Here and in B 1, 298 *grw* is "humble", not "silent."

22. A wordplay on *htm*, "to provide," and *htm*, "to destroy."

23. *Šwyt m lr m kw* is not: "Shade, act not as the sunheat," but rather: "Shade, don't make one into one who is *kw*," i.e., "dry."

24. *Wh'* is the *synodontis schall*; the other fishes are unidentified.

25. If the scribe skipped a line here, as Gardiner assumed, the omitted sentence ended with the second *nb*. But perhaps *nb* is a dittography and nothing is missing.

26. *Sp n mw* seems to mean "remnant of water," i.e., "shallow water." The garbled *shpr sp mw(?)* in B1, 199 probably contained the same expression. If so, the passage there would mean: "If the water is shallow and one crosses the river on sandals, is that a good crossing?"

27. Literally, "becomes one-does-not-know-what-is-in-the-heart."

28. *Gmt*, "to find useful."

29. I take *hry s3*, "under the back," to mean "to support the back" similar to *psw psd* in *Merikare*, P 136.

30. I.e., is not remembered; a wordplay on *sf* and *wsf*.