

The Real Love Story of Joseph and the Fair Egyptian



A Recently Discovered Wall Painting in a Tomb at Tel-el-Amarna Which Biblical Scholars Believe May Be a Representation of Joseph in His Chariot Following That of Pharaoh.

By Rev. C. H. Levey.

AND Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paneah, and he gave him to wife Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of On." (Genesis, xli:45.)

Scripture tells only this much of the romance of Joseph, the great Hebrew reformer of Egypt, and adds in a later chapter that two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, were born to the happy pair. (Gen. xli:50.)

But science, examining a mass of ancient volumes and papyri unearthed in ancient Egypt, has just discovered what purports to be the actual detailed story of Joseph's wooing of the fair Egyptian. It has been translated by "The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," whose headquarters are in London. And so circumstantial is it, so naive, that we must believe that the centuries-dead writer of it had access to first-hand knowledge of Joseph's love story which the Bible only mentions.

The script was in Greek and Syriac. It bears internal evidence, plain to experts, of having been copied from a Hebrew original. It is not improbable that this original was written during the very years of the captivity of Israel in Egypt; and by some one who had close knowledge of all the facts.

There is no mention of the famous incident of Potiphar's wife, but there are some very interesting and striking passages which seem to show that this willful lady was not alone in her admiration for the Pharaoh's trusted treasurer and that one of Joseph's great troubles was in successfully avoiding their attentions. The story is long and must necessarily be abridged here, but there is given some of the most striking and human passages.

In this story the father of Asenath is known as Pentephres, "a priest of Heliopolis, and a satrap of Pharaoh, exceeding rich and very sage and gentle. And he had a virgin daughter, by name Asenath, of eighteen years, tall and comely and beautiful to behold exceeding beyond every virgin upon the earth. And she was in all things like the daughters of the Hebrews, being tall as Sarah and comely as Rebecca and beautiful as Rachel."

Many suitors came, princes and nobles, but she would have none of those. "She was kept in a high tower and saw no man!"

When Pentephres heard that Joseph was coming to Heliopolis, collecting the grain during the seven years of plenty, he decided that Asenath should become the wife of the new great man in Egypt.

Runs the script: "And Pentephres said to her: 'Lo! Joseph, the mighty one of God, cometh to us to-day, and this man is ruler of all the land of Egypt. And this Joseph is a man that worshippeth God, and a man mighty in wisdom and knowledge. Come, dearest child, and I will give thee over to him to wife, and thou shalt be to him for a bride, and he himself shall be thy bridegroom forever!'"

"Then Asenath became very angry, saying: 'Wherefore, my lord father, speakest thou these words? Wilt thou to give me over as a captive to an alien and a fugitive and one that hath been sold?'"

"But when Asenath saw Joseph from her window she was sore struck in the soul and her heart was crushed, and her knees were loose and her whole body

trembled and she feared with great fear, and then she groaned and said in her heart: 'Alas me, miserable! where now shall I, the wretched one, go away? Or where shall I be hidden from his face? Or how shall Joseph, the son of God, see me, for that on my part I have spoken evil things about him? Alas me, miserable! Whither shall I go away and be hidden because he himself seeth every hiding place, and knoweth all things, and no hidden thing escapeth him by reason of the great light that is in him? And now may the God of Joseph be gracious to me, because in ignorance I have spoken wicked words against him. Now, therefore, let my father give me to Joseph for an handmaid and a bondswoman rather, and I will be in bondage to him forever!'"

"And Joseph came into the house of Pentephres and sat upon a chair. And Joseph looked up and saw Asenath peeping out, and he said to Pentephres: 'Who is that woman who is standing in the loft by the window? Let her go away from this house.' For Joseph feared, saying: 'Lest she herself also annoy me!' For all the wives and daughters of the princes and 'his satraps of all the land of Egypt used to annoy him—many wives and daughters of the Egyptians also, as many as beheld Joseph were distressed on account of his beauty."

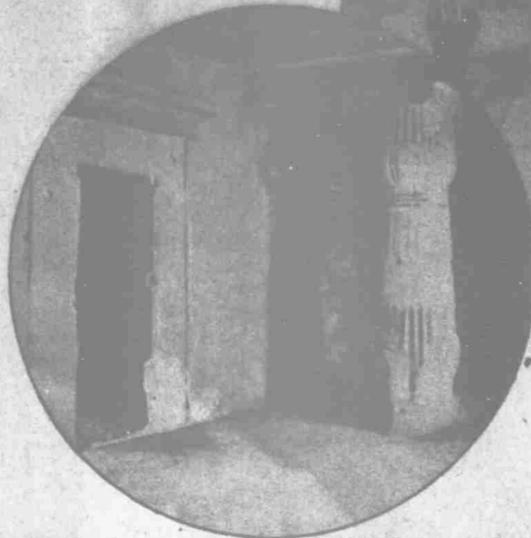
"And Pentephres said to him: 'My Lord, that woman whom thou hast seen standing in the loft is not a stranger, but is our daughter, one who hateth every man, and no other man hath ever seen her save thou only to-day; and if thou wishest, lord, she shall come and speak to thee, for that our daughter is as thy sister.'"

"And Joseph rejoiced with exceeding great joy, for that Pentephres said: 'She is a virgin hating every man.' And Joseph said to Pentephres and his wife: 'If she is your daughter, and is a virgin, let her come, for that she is my sister, and I love her from to-day as my sister.'"

"Then her mother went up into the loft and brought Asenath to Joseph, and Pentephres said to her: 'Kiss thy brother, because he also is a virgin even as thou to-day, and hateth every strange woman even as thou hast every strange man.' And Asenath said to Joseph: 'Hail, lord, blessed of God Most High.' And Joseph said to her: 'God, who quickeneth all things shall bless thee, damsel.' Pentephres said then to his daughter Asenath: 'Come and kiss thy brother.'"

"When Asenath then came up to kiss Joseph, Joseph stretched forth his right hand and laid it on her breast, and Joseph said: 'It is not meet for a man that wor-

shippeth God, who blasphemeth with his mouth the living God, to kiss a strange woman, who blasphemeth with her mouth dead and deaf idols; but the man that worshippeth God will kiss his mother and the sister who is born of his tribe and the wife who shareth his couch, who bless with their mouth the living God, likewise, also, if he not meet for a woman that worshippeth God to kiss a strange man; for that this is an abomination in the sight of the Lord God.'



A Photograph of the Sarcophagus Chamber in the Tel-el-Amarna Tomb Where the Supposed Joseph References Have Been Found.

"And when Asenath heard these words from Joseph she was sore distressed and groaned; and as she was looking steadfastly at Joseph with her eyes open they were filled with tears. And Joseph, when he saw her weeping, pitied her exceedingly, for that he was mild and merciful and one who feared the Lord. Then he lifted up his right hand above her head and said: 'Lord God of my father Israel, the Most High and the Mighty God, who quickeneth all things and callest from the darkness to the light, and from error to truth, and from death to life, bless Thou this virgin also, and refashion with thine hidden hand and number her with thy people whom thou choicest before all things were made.'"

"And Asenath rejoiced over the blessing of Joseph with exceeding great joy. Then she hastened and came into her loft by herself, and fell upon her bed in infirmity, for that there was in her joy and sorrow and great fear; and a continuous sweat was poured over her when she heard these words from Joseph, and when he spoke to

Science Unearths an Ancient Script Which Reveals Apparently First Hand Knowledge of the Famous Biblical Romance—No Mention of Potiphar's Wife but Other Temptations Hinted



Joseph Interpreting Pharaoh's Dream—an Interesting Painting by Harold Speed, R. A., of the Biblical Incident That Was the Source of His Rise to Power.

her in the name of God Most High. And she turned in penitence from her gods whom she was wont to worship."

Joseph left the palace of Pentephres that very day, although entreated to remain, promising to return a week later. And the tale has it that "Asenath neither ate bread nor drank water, but while all slept she herself alone was awake, and weeping and frequently beating her breast with her hand." And when one of her attendant virgins heard her weeping she asked: "What is it, my mistress, and wherefore art thou sad? And what is it that troubleth thee?" And Asenath answered: "Great and grievous pain hath attacked my head. I am infirm all over my limbs. Let me be still!" And then Asenath "took all her gods that were in her chamber, the gods of gold and of silver, wherewith there was no number, and brake them up into fragments and cast them through the window to poor men and beggars."

After eight days of fasting Asenath, bewailing her lot, decided to worship God saying: "I have heard many saying that the God of the Hebrews is a true God, and a living God, and a merciful God and pitiful, and full of mercy and gentle. . . . and I will be bold and will turn to Him and seek refuge with Him."

Then Asenath prayed to God, and in this remarkable book her full prayer is given, and the prayer is answered by the angel



Scribes of the Treasury Making Their Reports—from a Tomb Wall.

Michael, who tells her that she will be wife of Joseph.

As the tale has it: "And when Asenath had ceased making confession to the Lord, lo! the morning star also arose out of the Heaven in the east; and Asenath saw it and rejoiced and said: 'Hath the Lord then heard my prayer? for that this star is a messenger and herald of the light of the great day.' And lo! hard by the morning star the heaven was rent and a great and ineffable light appeared. And when she saw it Asenath fell upon her face upon the children, and straightway there came to her a man from Heaven, sending forth rays of light, and stood above her head. And as she is on her face, the divine angel said to her: 'Asenath, stand up, and she said: 'Who is he that calleth me? for that the door of my chamber be shut and the tower is high, and how thou hast he come into my chamber?'"

"And he calleth her a second time, saying: 'Asenath, Asenath. And she said: 'Here am I Lord tell me who thou art. And he said: 'I am the chief captain of the Lord God and commander of all the host of the Most High; stand up and stand upon thy feet, that I may speak to thee my words.' And she lifted up her face and saw, and lo! a man in all things like unto

Joseph, in robe and wreath and royal staff, save that his feet were as lightning, and his eyes as the light of the sun, and the hairs of his head as the flame of a burning torch."

And then the angel said to her: "Be of a good cheer, Asenath, the Virgin and pure, for the Lord hath given thee to-day to Joseph for a bride and he shall be thy bridegroom forever. And lo! for my part I go to Joseph and will speak to him concerning thee, and he will come to thee to-day and see thee and rejoice over thee and love thee and be thy bridegroom, and thou shalt be his beloved bride forever."

And on the eighth day a boy came to tell Asenath that Joseph had returned.

"Then Asenath arose and went down the stairs to meet Joseph. And Joseph having come into the court the gates were shut and all strangers remained outside. And Asenath came out from the porch to meet Joseph, and when he saw her he marvelled at her beauty and said to her: 'Who art thou, damsel? Quickly tell me.' And she said to him: 'I, lord, am thy handmaid, Asenath; all the idols I have cast away from me and they perished. And a man came from heaven and he said to me: 'I have given thee for a bride to Joseph, and he himself shall be thy bridegroom forever; and thy name shall not be called Asenath, but it shall be called 'City of Refuge,' and the Lord God shall reign over many nations, and through thee shall they seek refuge with God Most High.'"

"Then Joseph said to Asenath: 'Blessed art thou, woman of God Most High, and blessed is thy name forever. For that man came to me to-day and said these words concerning thee. And now come hither to me, thou virgin and pure, and wherefore standest thou afar off?' Then Joseph stretched out his hands, and embraced Asenath, and Asenath Joseph, and they kissed one another for a long time, and both lived again in their spirit. And Joseph kissed Asenath and gave her the spirit of life, then the second time he gave her the spirit of wisdom, and the third time he kissed her tenderly and gave her the spirit of truth."

Joseph insisted that some save Pharaoh should bring them together, and after the King had sent for Asenath and her father Pharaoh "took Joseph and Asenath and set golden wreaths upon their heads, and Pharaoh set Asenath at Joseph's right hand. Then Pharaoh turned them round to face one another and brought them mouth to mouth, and they kissed one another. And Pharaoh made a wedding for Joseph and a great dinner and much drinking during seven days, and he called together all the rulers of Egypt and all the kings of the nations, having made proclamation in the land of Egypt, saying: 'Every man who shall do work during the seven days of the wedding of Joseph and Asenath shall surely die.'"

The tale does not, however, end here, for conspires come later, when the son of Pharaoh plots to have Joseph killed that he may possess Asenath. Conspirators are also formed against Pharaoh himself, but the conspirators are slain.

The book states: "Then Pharaoh's son upon the same night came to his father's bed-chamber to slay him with the sword. His father's guards thereupon hindered him from coming into his father. And he on hearing that he could not enter went away in wrath. And then he and his son went away to meet Joseph and Asenath."

"And Asenath rose in the morning and said to Joseph: 'I am going to the possession of our inheritance as thou hast said; but my soul feareth exceedingly for that thou art parting from me.' And Joseph said to her: 'Be of good cheer and be not afraid, but rather go away rejoicing, in dread of no man whatsoever, for that the Lord is with thee and He himself will preserve thee as the apple of an eye from every evil.' And when Asenath reached the place of the ravine with the six hundred men, suddenly they they who were with Pharaoh's son came forth from their ambush and joined battle with those who were with Asenath, and cut them all down with their swords, and all her followers they slew, but Asenath fled with her chariot."

Whatever its history, it sheds a new and brilliant light upon a civilization and a great drama long passed into dust, but still living in the minds and imaginations of men.