

AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN QUEEN

by G. H. LANG

MR. G. H. LANG, widely known and esteemed as a biblical expositor, has given more consideration than many have done to the claim that much ancient mythology, especially in the Near East, represents a distorted and corrupted reminiscence of religious truth known at an earlier period. This would accord with the teaching of Scripture—not only in Genesis but also in the New Testament, notably in Rom. 1: 18 ff., where the charge is brought against mankind that, knowing God, they did not choose to retain Him in their knowledge, but exchanged His truth for falsehood and fell into idolatry. In a series of papers on "The Bible and Mythology", the first of which appeared in our pages as early as 1950, he has undertaken to show how some of those elements of pristine truths persisted, intermingled as they were with idolatrous beliefs and practices. Here we present the second study in this series.

IN THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY of July, 1950, there appeared an article entitled "An Ancient Egyptian Prayer". That prayer was taken from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, dated from perhaps B.C. 2000. It was addressed by a scribe to the God of Right and Truth and was unique as revealing what measure of knowledge of the true God, and of His requirements, a heathen in a wicked, polytheistic land possessed long after the Flood and the dispersion of the nations. The article considered the bearing of this on such questions as the original acquaintance with truth that persisted after the Flood; the consequent moral responsibility of mankind Godward, according to Romans 1: 18-32, with the darkening of the human mind through love of sin and rejection of light available; yet the continuing possibility of one so benighted seeking and finding the true God by approaching Him humbly.

It was my hope to have then continued this line of study, but circumstances have prevented. It will be profitable to take another steady look into that world of moral darkness by thinking of a celebrated Queen of Egypt. She was named Hatshepsut and lived about 1500 B.C., and thus a little before Moses. This lends immediate value to our study by picturing the background of the events narrated in Genesis 39 ff. and the rest of the Pentateuch, the period of Joseph, Moses, and the Exodus of Israel.

This Queen was a woman of character, vigour, intellect, and the

artistic sense, as testified by buildings she erected. I found her temple at Dêr el-Bahri well worth a long journey to see, though only its ruins remain. Its position, structure, and ornamentation show magnificence of conception and splendour in execution. Yet such admirable qualities have in themselves no moral power but may consist with the deepest degradation, of which painful fact there are many modern examples. The great Queen, as was then customary, was the wife of her own brother, against which social abomination no public sentiment existed. With such degraded example in the royal household it can be imagined how perverted and corrupt was social life in general. This explains why, when God brought Israel out of that land, He speedily gave drastic instructions against all unnatural sexual relations, specifying a long list of such abominable unions practised in Egypt and Canaan, and denouncing capital punishment as the penalty (Lev. 18 and 20).

Some practices known in Egypt, though in themselves hurtful, could be tolerated and removed gradually, such as polygamy and slavery; but those in view were as a public cancer or gangrene and the severest surgery was demanded and could alone be beneficial. So terrible was the moral condition that in the judgment of God it demanded the utter extermination of the seven nations then inhabiting Canaan, which was solemnly explained to Israel, as in the chapters above cited.

One of the most celebrated works of this great Queen was the erection at Karnak of two majestic obelisks. As to these she swore a mighty oath that they were completed in only seven months after the order for them had been given. In her very informative book *Egyptian Temples* (p. 70), Margaret A. Murray (Assistant Professor of Egyptology at University College, London), wrote: "The Queen appears to have realized that even for Egyptian quarry-men, stone-masons, and architects, it was a remarkable feat, for she records the fact on her inscription on the obelisks". How remarkable a feat it was is shown by facts. Aswan is the most southerly town of Egypt, beyond which stretch the vast Nubian deserts. Nearby, at Syene, are red granite quarries where such obelisks were quarried. The visitor still sees there a monolith lying where it was split off from the side of the hill. I estimated its length as about 80 feet, its breadth as some 8 feet at the base. Along the hill are seen the series of grooves cut so as to take the wood plugs, which, being kept wet, swelled until the rock split and the mighty

mass fell away. In this instance, when detached a long flaw showed that the vast block would not stand the strain of being transported and erected, so there it still lies.

These obelisks were monoliths, that is, one single stone. One such stands on the Thames Embankment in London, but it is not the size of those Hatshepsut erected. These were almost 100 feet (97 ft. 6 in.) in height and about 10 feet square at the base. They may weigh 250 tons each. Having been first cut out of the mountain, this vast and weighty stone had to be hauled on rollers some distance to the edge of the Nile, then lifted on to timber floats and secured. It had then to be steered some 130 miles down the river—no small feat in navigation; then successfully moored to the shore, and again hauled the considerable distance over the slightly ascending land to the temple. Here the carvers had to cut in the granite the decorations and inscriptions, and, lastly, this mighty mass, prodigious in size and weight, was elevated to the vertical and secured on its base. Let the labour involved and the skill required be estimated, and the Queen's boast is felt to be reasonable. Yet she had doubts whether she would be believed and so she attested the statement by oath.

This was a little before Moses and the events narrated in his books. What now becomes of the infidel attack on his histories that, so far back as that, mankind was only slowly struggling upward from its degraded animal beginnings and emerging to human intelligence? It is one of the most preposterous falsehoods ever foisted by Satan upon credulous man, all too ready to be beguiled by the conceit that he is ascending, and not fallen and falling as the Bible teaches. Archaeology has now carried back our knowledge far before the date of Hatshepsut, and reveals man as having always been, like his ancient monuments now are, noble, if marred and decaying.

Endless testimony to this is available. In the catalogue (1925) of the *Principal Monuments Exhibited in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo*, Exhibit 140 (p. 5) is described as a "Wooden statue, of life-like appearance, known as the 'Sheikh-el-Beled' or 'chief man of the village', the workmen who found it having been struck by its resemblance to the head-man of the village of Sakkara. It belongs to the IVth dynasty." There is a replica in the British Museum. Of life-like appearance it truly is. There is life in the eye, pride in the countenance, resolution in the poise, aggressive-

ness in the stride—it is easy to picture this domineering man advancing to meet an opponent, determined to get his way.

Dynasty IV was a thousand years or more before Hatshepsut, so that in stone carving and wood carving, as builders, artists, jewellers, in the vast and in the detail, men of those early times were masters, able to conceive and to execute magnificent works. And their writings show that they were philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers. And yet with all this endowment of mind they were debased in morals, slaves to unnameable vices, perpetrators of the most ghastly cruelties, and not ashamed to parade their degradation upon the temples, palaces, and monuments which exhibit at once their greatness and their baseness. Queen Hatshepsut was a heathen.

Let us look deeper than her intellect into her heart. Her inscription mentioned enables this. It reads as follows, as given by Margaret Murray: "The full form of the great royal oath is worth nothing . . . :

I sat in the palace, I remembered him who made me, my heart led me to make for him two great obelisks, whose points mingled with the sky, in the splendid colonnade between the two great pylons of the King Tehutmes I. I swear as Ra loves me, as my father Amon favours me, as my nostrils are filled with satisfying life, as I wear the White Crown, as I appear in the Red Crown, as Horus and Seth have united for me their portions, as I rule this land like the son of Isis, as I have become strong like the son of Nut, as Ra sets in the evening Barque, as he rises in the morning Barque, as he joins his two Mothers in the divine Barque, as heaven abides, as that which he has made endures, as I shall be to eternity like a never-setting star, as I shall go down in the west like Atum, [so surely] these two great obelisks, which my Majesty has wrought with fine gold for my father Amon, are of one block of enduring granite without seam or joining. My Majesty exacted work thereon from the first day of Mechir until the last of Mesore, making seven months of work."¹

Here writes a polytheist. She mentions nine gods or goddesses, Ra, Amon, Horus, Seth, Isis, Nut, the two Mothers, and Atum. It may be but a coincidence, but it reminds of Macaulay's opening of the *Lay of Horatius*, of events a thousand years later than Hatshepsut, and in Italy:

Lars Porsena of Clusium
By the Nine Gods he swore
That the great house of Tarquin
Should suffer wrong no more.
By the Nine Gods he swore it . . .

¹ *Egyptian Temples*, pp. 70 f.

Here, then, is a mind confused with polytheistic notions, but let it be observed how many ideas are expressed which are essential truths connected with the one true God:

1. Her god is her father: "my father Amon". In Luke 3: 38 we read of "Adam the son of God". The Queen was here claiming divine descent in a sense that was false, at which subject we may look in a later paper; but surely in the idea itself there sounded an echo of the origin of man by direct creative act of God.

2. "My father Amon favours me." Man depends upon the favour of God, which is indeed a foundation and universal truth.

3. "My nostrils are filled with satisfying life." The monuments give pictures of gods breathing into the mouth of worshippers, so imparting supernatural vitality to mortals. This was the fact at man's creation: "Jehovah Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [person]" (Gen. 2: 7). This is a continual fact: "He Himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17: 25); and so Daniel reminded and warned Belshazzar of Babylon of "the God in whose hand thy breath is" (Dan. 5: 23). The very picture is given in John 20: 22, of the risen Lord and His servants: "He breathed on them and said, Receive ye spirit holy". Hatshepsut had experienced that *this* life, imparted by divine inspiration, affords a satisfaction beyond merely natural life. How much fuller and richer is the life received from the risen Son of God! This truly is *satisfying* life, as the humble may and should experience by contact with his divine Lord.

Many Christians in recent years have experienced supernatural visitations. It has been generally assumed that the origin of these was of God because accompanied by an accession of peace, joy, and zeal in the work of the Lord. But care is needed. Queen Hatshepsut must have gained tranquillity and joy or she could not have felt life to be satisfying, and she too became extraordinarily glad and diligent in the service of her god, a great fallen angel. From this it appears that the emotional test is not by itself sufficient to determine the source of supernatural experiences.

4. "The White Crown . . . the Red Crown."² *The Book of the Dead* gives the conceptions held during the period in which Hatshepsut lived. Various "crowns" are mentioned. The feature they have in common is that they are the sign of victory and sovereignty, granted in resurrection as the reward of conflict and fidelity on

² [The white and red crowns were the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt respectively. Ed.]

earth. Such is also the Biblical significance of the figure "crown", as in 1 Cor. 9: 25; Rev. 2: 10; 3: 11; and in both these books the mortal who is to reign in the world beyond must have learned to reign in present supremacy over daily besetments: as Hatshepsut says, in the present tense, "I wear the White Crown . . . I rule this land . . . I have become strong."

5. "Heaven abides . . . that which Ra hath made endures." The heavens and the earth are "made", are a creation; a denial of the error that matter is eternal. And they are permanent, not evanescent.

6. "I shall be to eternity like a never-setting star." About the same period Balaam, a sage from the East, used the same figure of a conquering sovereign: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24: 17). A thousand years later than the Queen an angel spoke to Daniel of the eternal reward of the righteous and valiant in this life, and used this same figure: "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12: 3). The Lord from heaven gave the like promise to those who shall conquer in His battles in this age: "He that overcometh . . . I will give to him the morning star" (Rev. 2: 26, 28). This is not to be read, "I will give to him *to see* the morning star"; but the "star" itself is a gift to the victor, a possession, attribute, honour. This is how the term was understood in those ancient times in Egypt, as may be seen in *The Book of the Dead* (pp. 169, 185); the victor himself became as the morning star.

The question arises how so many true ideas worked in the mind of a heathen woman, though misapplied. This is part of the larger question of how her people through the centuries were dominated by the expectation of a resurrection of the body and animated by the hope of being exalted after death to share in the life of the gods in an upper world. The details of this hope were elaborated in strange figures and earthly notions, but its essence was true. Whence was it derived if not from earlier divine revelations, granted to the race before false philosophies and degrading idolatries corrupted men's understanding and desires?

We have already quoted an Eastern seer of about the time of Hatshepsut, Balaam of Mesopotamia. In the same era another Eastern sage, Job, had expressed his confident expectation that, though his body should die, yet from his flesh he should see on earth a Kinsman-Redeemer, who is the Last (Job 19: 25-27; cf. Isa. 48: 12). And some centuries earlier than these Abraham

had an assured expectation that, though Isaac might be killed, yet God would raise him again to life (Heb. 11: 17-19). In a later study we may see that this conception existed in Sumeria from the earliest days after the Flood.

All this evidences a considerable knowledge of the true God and His far-reaching purposes, which implies an early revelation from His side. This is intimated in the God-given histories of our race. God personally spoke to Isaac and guaranteed the fulfilment of His covenant with Abraham "because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26: 2-5). There is no specific record of this divine instruction of Abraham with regard to God's commandments, statutes, and laws; but it was evidently a necessity that the man who was chosen to stand for God amidst and against the prevalent apostasy and corruption should be informed about the requirements of the Holy God he was to represent and serve. Just at that time the monarch of that region, Hammurabi, issued *his* code of laws, and so did the true God lay down *His* laws.

But this must have been the renewal, three centuries after the Flood, of instruction already given before the Flood; otherwise how should Noah have known how so to live among the wicked that God could say, "thee have I seen righteous before Me"? (Gen. 7: 1). Similarly, four hundred years after Abraham His laws were repeated and enjoined by God through Moses and embodied in the Mosaic code. This is part of the justification of the Biblical condemnation of that ancient world; for, in addition to light upon the Creator gained from His works in the created universe, man had this fuller knowledge of Him, and yet "knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither give thanks" for all His benefits, but "refused to have God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1: 18-32).

Into such apostate hearts the god of this world infused *his* ideas and rebellious ways. At that time arose false philosophies concerning God, the universe, and man; and idolatry of the creature supplanted the worship of the Creator. This did not arise haphazard, but was the scheme of Satan to oust the living God. His ambition was to be "like the Most High" (Isa. 14: 14), and his scheme substituted himself in the room of God, and his fallen angels, his associates in rebellion, became the demon demi-gods of the polytheistic religions. The principle of sacrifices and offerings was incorporated into his system, but directed to him and his associated heavenly rulers. His triple law, that man should obey the lusts of his body, the desires of his eye, and live to glorify

himself, ousted the laws of God, and fostered human corruption.

From this parallel of the Satanic kingdom to the kingdom of God there would follow naturally that evident commingling of the ancient truths and divinely ordained practices with the confusing and corrupting notions of men, which commingling did in fact exist in paganism. Truth could not be wholly eradicated, and there was ever the possibility that some individuals might follow some gleam of light falling across the darkness, such as that Egyptian scribe of whom our former article spoke, who addressed his prayer seriously to "the God of Right and Truth", of whom he knew but little, but enough to long to be reconciled to Him. To such sincere longing that holy and gracious God did ever respond (Rom. 2: 6, 7). And though in general, in those dark periods, He suffered those nations whom He had given up (Rom. 1: 24, 26, 28) to "walk in their own ways", yet He left not Himself without witness in natural providences (Acts 14: 16, 17), for He desired "that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him" in Whom in reality they lived and moved and had their very existence (Acts 17: 26-28).

Moreover, on occasions He warned men by visitations of His holy wrath upon their sins, as by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities placed at the centre of the nations, and by His exemplary dealings with Pharaoh and his mighty people. Later He sent arresting messages through such prophets as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, and in the fulness of the seasons He sent worldwide the message of mercy and salvation by Jesus Christ, His Son incarnate.

It is in this general situation that we must view such a heathen as Queen Hatshepsut, darkened indeed in her understanding, yet impelled by certain true conceptions though applied to false demon gods. In his very illuminating book *Religious Life in Ancient Egypt* (p. 20), the celebrated archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie writes as follows concerning the Queen's oath as to the obelisks:

The Spiritual Life

In the XVIIIth dynasty direct inspiration is claimed by Hatshepsut: "I remembered him who fashioned me, my heart led me to make for him two obelisks. . . . I have done this from a loving heart for my father Amen. . . . I was wise by his excellent spirit. I did not forget anything of that which he executed. My Majesty knoweth that he is divine. I did it under his command, he it was who led me. I conceived not any works without his doing, he it was who gave me direction. I slept not because of his temple, I erred not from that

which he commanded, my heart was wise before my Father, I entered upon the affairs of his heart."

What an awful warning is this of the reality of intercourse with a demon-god, and of the intimacy man can reach with a fallen angel. What implicit confidence the Queen had in her god, what unreserved devotion she displayed! Amen was her "father", her creator who had fashioned her. She knew him to be divine. It was his excellent spirit that made her wise. Her public works were conceived through him, she did nothing but by his direction. It was he who commanded and led, and he it was who executed the works. It was hers not to forget anything, nor to err from his commandment. Her heart was wise before her father, and she entered into the affairs of his heart. And all was done out of love to her god, her father.

How blessed when such unrestrained intimacy and devotion mark a man's relationships with the living and true God. Nothing less is our duty, nothing less is our portion: all this is possible, our privilege, and our responsibility.

All this was strikingly exemplified a thousand years later when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon addressed his false god, the demon ruler of his city, as follows. Professor Sayce wrote:

It is thus that Nebuchadnezzar addresses his god in the plenitude of his glory and power—

To Merodach, my lord, I prayed; I began to him my petition; the word of my heart sought him, and I said: "O prince that art from everlasting, lord of all that exists, for the king whom thou lovest, whom thou callest by name, as it seems good unto thee thou guidest his name aright, thou watchest over him in the path of righteousness! I, the prince who obeys thee, am the work of thy hands; thou hast created me, and hast intrusted to me the sovereignty over multitudes of men, according to thy goodness, O lord, which thou hast made to pass over them all. Let me love thy supreme lordship, let the fear of thy divinity exist in my heart, and give what seemeth good unto thee, since thou maintainest my life." Then he, the firstborn, the glorious, the leader of the gods, Merodach, the prince, heard my prayer and accepted my petition.¹

Here one of the most massive personalities that ever trod the earth attributes to a fallen angel the essential characteristics and activities of the true God, and renders to this deceiving spirit the love, devotion, and obedience rightly due to Deity. This argues again that true conceptions concerning God had survived for two thousand years after the Flood, but were wrongly applied. It

¹ A. H. Sayce, *The Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia* (1903), p. 323.

argues also that there was reality in this intercourse with demon gods, for so exceptionally capable a man as this was not one to be perpetually deluded.

Into the experience of this majestic heathen monarch the Most High forcibly obtruded Himself and His claims by startling dreams, attested interpretations, with mighty signs, such as the fiery furnace. To him was given an arresting vision, a solemn warning of impending judgment at the hands of the higher powers of heaven, and an appeal to turn from his sins. A respite of a whole year was granted, to no purpose: then the blow fell and the proud emperor suddenly went mad. He was the subject of a new birth, but into the lower kingdom of the beasts (Dan. 4: 16). After seven years he accepted the discipline, humbled himself before the true God, of whom he knew but whom he had defied, and was restored to sanity and royalty. He then rendered to the Most High God the honour and service of his heart, and his last recorded words are: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of the heavens; for all His works are truth, and His ways justice; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan. 4: 37).

Such dealings of God with heathen kings were not limited to Nebuchadnezzar. He had spoken thus to the Philistine Ahimelech, and had saved him from unwitting sin (Gen. 20). He had overwhelmed the king of Sodom, and later Pharaoh of Egypt. He dealt in judgment with Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, because he was wilfully disregarding the lesson taught to his grandfather, of which he knew. He shortly commissioned Cyrus of Persia to rebuild His temple at Jerusalem.

Such dealings with monarchs gave knowledge, warning, and opportunity to their peoples, especially when they issued royal proclamations on the subject, displaying both the grace and justice of the true God. "Behold, then, the goodness and severity of God", even as He cried aloud to men of old, and still cries to us, "toward thee God's goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11: 22, 23).

Shortly after Hatshepsut's day God gave instructions for the preparing of a house in which He would dwell among His people Israel. It is deeply instructive to note the similarities of the Tabernacle and the Egyptian temples, and yet more important to observe the contrasts. We cannot pursue this theme, but may notice how Moses also was not left to any skill or device of his own, but was

wholly dependent upon Jehovah for wisdom and knowledge, and was neither to forget any detail, nor add anything to the divine pattern showed to him in the Mount (Ex. 25: 40). The actual artificers also received a special endowment for their work, being "filled with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, and to devise skilful works" (Ex. 35: 30-35). In Hebrews 8 this duty of conformity to the heavenly pattern is heavily emphasized for our guidance in the work of God.

Five centuries later another great monarch, David, had similar intercourse with Jehovah, his God, regarding a superb temple that was to be built for His honour. To Solomon, his son, who was to be actual builder, David gave the pattern of the vast structure and all its details, and said: "All this have I been made to understand in writing from the hand of Jehovah, even all the works of this pattern" (1 Chron. 28: 11-19).

A thousand years passed, and the Master Workman of the whole universe, the Son of God, appeared on earth as man, to perfect the will of the Father, and in particular to build a spiritual house, composed of living stones, that is, regenerated men and women. This house is to be the heavenly and eternal building of God. John the apostle watched Him at the Father's work, and was divinely illuminated as to His person and service. He heard the Lord Himself describe His own intimacy with the Father and entire dependence upon Him: "I can of myself do nothing: as I hear I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me"; for "the Son can do nothing of himself, but what He seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5: 30, 19). The active principle of His life was that He must be engaged "in the things of my Father" (Luke 2: 49). The vital food of His soul was "to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4: 34). And all His unreserved dedication to the Father, even unto the death of the cross, was the expression of His affection for God, even as He said: "that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, *let us go hence*"—to Gethsemane and Calvary! (John 14: 31).

Hatshepsut's love offerings to her god, her temple and obelisks, were indeed notable; but the house which David and Solomon erected, said David, "must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries" (1 Chron. 22: 5). But this earthly

building has no greatness or glory as compared with the heavenly house, or city, which Christ is building; for this shall shine with no less splendour than the very glory of God Himself (Rev. 21: 11). Because to the members of this heavenly company, the church of the firstborn ones, who are enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12: 23), it is written that "ye should walk worthily of God, who called you into His own kingdom and glory", even "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 2: 12; 2 Thess. 2: 14).

It is to co-operation with Him in this noblest of all divine enterprises that the followers of Christ are called. This is our privilege, the service of Christ in and for His church. For this grand end no gifts, labour, devotion can be deemed excessive. It should be an all-consuming passion. But all must be offered and rendered out of sincere personal affection to the Lord, for only love is acceptable to God who is love (1 Cor. 13: 1-3); and true love knows no reserves.

Hatshepsut's wholehearted devotion to the affairs of her false god puts to shame all Laodicean lukewarmness towards our God of truth and right. The Lord grant that our look into her heart and at her works may impel us to a yet fuller dedication of heart and life to Christ our Lord. Then will He fill us with His Spirit, thereby unite us with His life, infuse into us His wisdom and energy, and fire us with unquenchable enthusiasm for His cause; nor shall our labour have but transient beauty and value, but shall abide for ever in His everlasting kingdom and to His joy and glory. And as men went, and still go, to admire the works of Hatshepsut, so in Christ's coming day shall "He come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed" (2 Thess 1: 1-12).

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