Excerpted from *Genesis in Poetry*
© Jeffrey M Cohen, 2020
www.Wipfandstock.com

JACOB AND FAMILY SETTLE IN EGYPT

(46:1 – 7, 28 – 47:27)

Seventy of Jacob's offspring
Made the journey down,
And word spread through Egypt
That a man of great renown—
The father of their Viceroy—
Would shortly alight;
So, they gathered in their thousands
To express their delight.

Joseph was the first
To greet his aged dad;
One dressed in royal robes,
The other, as a shepherd clad.

They fell around each other's neck,
Tears fusing cheek to cheek.
They had so many things to say,
But neither of them could speak.

At last, Jacob, finding his voice,
Looked into his son's eyes:
''Now I can die having seen your face—
Farewell my sorrows and sighs!''

Joseph then primed his brothers
For their audience with Pharaoh the king:
‘‘Say you’re the owners of vast herds—
Impression is everything!’’

But the brothers were all simple folk,
Not given to exaggeration:
‘‘We tend sheep,’’ they told Pharaoh,
To Joseph’s consternation!

When He was presented to the king,
Jacob blessed him to his face:
‘‘May the One who grants thee royal estate
Forever show thee grace.’’

‘‘How old are you, my venerable man?’’
Pharaoh asked his guest.
‘‘One hundred and thirty years, royal sir,
All marked by joys suppressed.’’

Pharaoh was drawn to the man,
And the light he radiated;
His life of pain, of loss and grief
Was, in no way, indicated:

‘‘Your sons, I hear, are as herdsmen, skilled;
Now, Joseph’s plan is to build
Vast pens to enclose the flocks we’ll take
From all my subjects in the wake
Of the crippling famine about to arrive,
Making it impossible to survive

Without exchanging the cattle they own
For a share of the corn
That we've grown.

''This is where your sons fit in:
They will be the lynch-pin
Of the entire administration
Of what we acquire by sequestration:
From the health and welfare of each flock
To the breeding of new live-stock.
And if they meet with success,
To untold wealth they'll gain access.

''You are most welcome in my land;
To all your family I extend the hand
Of friendship and co-operation.
Hail, new nobility
Of our nation!''

Joseph's plan was executed:
The land of Egypt was state-looted,
As the deeds of every field
Were handed in for their yield
Of state-supplied and packaged grain—
A life-line when there was no rain.

The dispossessed population
Had to suffer relocation;
Some in cities incarcerated—
Hatred of Hebrews openly stated.

Others became tenant farmers,

Their rent, a fifth of their garners;

Only the priests were saved that fate;

No compulsory purchase of their estate.

The Israelites soon put down roots,

Enjoying newly-embraced pursuits;

They prospered greatly and multiplied;

Their influence felt country-wide.

* * *