

THE

Sunday School

MAGAZINE

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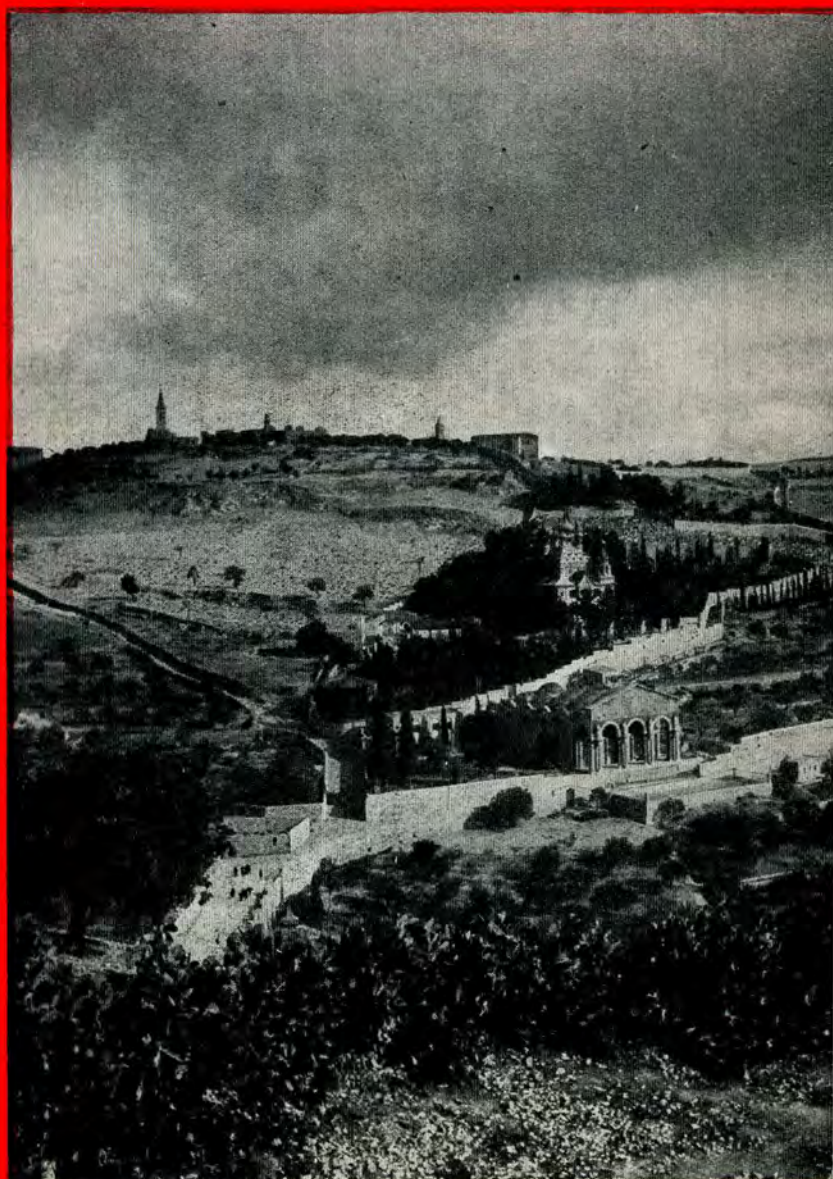
Editor: J. Reginald Hill

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Children's Special Service Mission

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Did Moses Write Genesis?

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II. The Wellhausen Theory

IT is unnecessary here to trace the history of "Pentateuchal criticism". But, as the views of the Wellhausen school are still widely held (though their insecure basis is being increasingly realized), it may be useful to summarize them. They find in the Pentateuch a number of separate documents, composed at different times, and not completed until after the return from the Babylonian Exile. Of these documents the chief are: (1) The Book of the Covenant, the social and ritual code of a primitive agricultural community, contained in Exod. 21-23 and 34, and referred to by the abbreviation BC. (2) Two parallel documents, containing both narrative and legislation, produced under prophetic influence in the days of the divided monarchy (between 850 and 750 B.C.). One of these (J) was produced in the southern kingdom of Judah, the other (E) in the northern kingdom of Ephraim (or Israel). Before long, these two were combined in a composite document JE, in which BC was incorporated.¹ (3) Next in time comes the Book of Deuteronomy (abbreviation D) thought to be the book found in the temple in Josiah's reign (621 B.C.) and to have been written but a short time before.² Now, the book which Hilkiah found in the temple (2 Kings 22. 8) may have been Deuteronomy, but the copy may well have lain in the building for a long time; perhaps it was deposited in a wall when the temple was founded in Solomon's time

and discovered in Josiah's reign as a result of the recent dilapidations. (4) Lev. 17-26 is supposed to represent another code—the Holiness Code (H)—belonging to the closing days of the kingdom of Judah and showing affinities with the last nine chapters of Ezekiel. (5) This was incorporated after the return from the Babylonian exile in a much larger document called the Priestly Code (P). P began with a summary of history from the Creation to the Exodus, and continued with the elaborate and detailed ritual prescriptions concerning the tabernacle and priesthood in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. The promulgation of P is associated in the Wellhausen theory with Ezra's visit to Jerusalem and his public reading of "the book of the law of Moses" recorded in Neh. 8 (444 B.C.). Soon afterwards, P was made the framework into which the other documents, JE and D in particular, were fitted so as to form the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua much as we have them now.



SCRIBES OF THE TORAH OR JEWISH PENTATEUCH.

Photo: American Colony in Jerusalem.

Defects of the Theory

This elaborate theory is so much at variance with the evidence which these books bear on their face that one may wonder at the wide measure of acceptance which it rapidly gained. This was largely because Wellhausen depended not merely upon linguistic phenomena, as earlier critics had chiefly done, but presented a documentary analysis which seemed to fit the history of Israel exactly. Even so, the Biblical record of the history of Israel had at times to be modified to fit his documentary theory. But so cogent did the theory appear, especially as introduced to the British public by devout scholars like W. Robertson Smith in Scotland and S. R. Driver in England, that it soon attained the status of a new orthodoxy, from which a man dissented at the risk of his reputation for scholarship. In recent years, however, voices have been raised in various lands pointing out the weaknesses of Wellhausenism. Such a Deuteronomic reform as it envisaged in Josiah's reign has little historical support. The Priestly Code, the latest stratum in the Pentateuch according to Wellhausenism, is now shown by discoveries at places like Ras Shamra in Syria and Kirkuk in Iraq to contain some of the most primitive elements in the Old Testament. But the chief defect in the Wellhausen scheme is that it treated the Pentateuchal legislation and the history of Israel from the standpoint of an evolutionary naturalism which left no room for divine revelation. Those who wish to pursue the subject further may consult Professor O. T. Allis's book *The Five Books of Moses* which appeared in U.S.A. in 1943 and was published in a British edition by Messrs. James Clarke & Co., Ltd. (18s.).

Professor Yahuda's Argument

But we are concerned with the Book of Genesis. And here special mention must be made of Professor A. S. Yahuda's very important work *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian*. The first (and thus far the only) volume of this work, which was published by the Oxford University Press in 1933, deals with the careers of Joseph and Moses in Egypt and with the primeval records

of Gen. 1-11. We should, of course, expect to find a marked Egyptian colouring in those narratives which have an Egyptian setting. And this is just what we do find. The later chapters of Genesis and the earlier chapters of Exodus present numerous examples of Egyptian words, phrases, idioms, technical terms, proper names, and so forth. For example, in Pharaoh's dream at the beginning of Gen. 41, the Hebrew words translated "river" and "meadow" are both Egyptian in origin—the former, *ye'or*, being used in the Old Testament only for the Nile, and the latter, *achu*, denoting the reed-grass growing on the banks of the Nile. Again, the phrase "the brink of the river" in verse 3 is literally "the lip of the river", and this, according to Dr. Yahuda, is an Egyptian idiom reproduced in Hebrew. The single verse Exod. 2. 3 contains four Egyptian words—those translated "ark", "bulrushes" (i.e. papyrus), "flags" and "river". Joseph's Egyptian name Zaphnath-Paaneah is explained by Dr. Yahuda as *dzefa-n-ta Pu-Anekh*, lit., "Food of the land is this living one", which he compares with Gen. 42. 6 where Joseph is described as "Feeder of all the people of the land."

Egyptian element in early Genesis

Such examples from the Egyptian narratives of the Pentateuch could be multiplied. But a more impressive fact is that in Gen. 1-11, set in a Babylonian milieu, the Babylonian linguistic element is not so great as we should have expected, whereas there is a surprisingly prominent Egyptian element. Referring to the narratives of the Creation, Fall, and Deluge, Dr. Yahuda emphasizes "how profoundly the Genesis stories were permeated by Egyptian conceptions in the newly modified form in which they have come down to us, and how thoroughly they are dominated also by the spirit of the Egyptian language" (p. 121). Even the word for Noah's ark (*tebah*) is of Egyptian and not of Babylonian origin. These narratives, in spite of their original Babylonian setting, have passed through an Egyptian stage of transmission.

Dr. Yahuda concludes that the evidence all points to our having in Genesis a work which,

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space, and demonstrating *obstinacy* and *awkwardness*. Sometimes they are brimming over with *self-confidence*; at others they are *gloomy*, *depressed* and *irritable*. There may be reasons for the more unpleasant traits—earlier spoiling and pampering; or, on the other hand, harsh training in the home which has given John and Mary no chance to express themselves.

A Doctor could now take my pen to tell us of the physical changes which are taking place, accounting in measure for the curious features in behaviour which we have just noticed. All of us are familiar too with that period when John and Mary seem quite clumsy in bodily movement, they seem long-legged and their feet get in the way. This usually passes and the erstwhile grace and often beauty of movement is re-captured. It is important to bear in mind that unless some form of ill-health is taking its toll, adolescents are usually full of animal spirits, although we should look out for those who prefer quietness, those who love books, and those who do not easily mix with others.

Home and School

The ability to make judgments and to criticise (using this word in its wider and better sense) is becoming more evident. Father, Mother, and Teacher are no longer considered to be infallible, if they ever were! John may resent Father posing as if he knows everything and refusing to listen to his ideas or point of view. He may rebel against Mother's over-attention and apron strings, and a wise Mother will loosen her hold or make it less apparent, giving John scope for his rising years. Mary may act similarly, perhaps not so pronouncedly, although her training, for feminine reasons, may require more delicate and careful discretion.

I believe John and Mary can be goaded to passion by, "Now, when I was a boy . . .", or "My mother used to say to me . . ." This way of giving advice should be indulged in sparingly, for our young friends are cute enough to suspect that some of this anecdote may be fanciful or exaggerated. In any case, frequent admonition or advice commencing in these and kindred phrases is irritating and vexatious to them.

At School we have still much to learn concerning the education of adolescents, but we are trying as never before to provide for John and Mary, to help them solve their difficulties, and to give them sound guidance and good example.

Next month we will continue with this period in its relation to our Sunday School and later work. In my travels over England and Wales to meet and discuss problems with Sunday School and other workers among the young, I find that the bulk of the questions and the hardest to answer concern the adolescent.

DID MOSES WRITE GENESIS?

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in both language and subject-matter, "is only possible and comprehensible in a milieu where Hebrews and Egyptians lived side by side". The Hebrew in which it is written, he holds, had just "reached perfection as a literary language" under the Egyptian influence which caused its independent development from its sister-dialects of Canaan. It is plain that, if Dr. Yahuda's argument is substantially sound, it provides us with strong confirmation of the tradition which connects the composition of Genesis with the name of Moses.

To be continued.

FOOTNOTES.

The abbreviations J and E originally stood for "Jehovist" and "Elohist", the respective compilers of these two parallel documents. This was because it was believed that, up to the early chapters of Exodus, the one compiler called God "Jehovah" and the other called Him "Elohim". The use of the names of God as a criterion for distinguishing the component documents of the Pentateuch was first suggested by a French physician, Jean Astruc, in a book published anonymously at Brussels in 1753: "Conjectures on the original Memoirs which Moses appears to have used for the Composition of Genesis". Later critics decided that "Elohim" must have been used as a name for God by two separate documents, E and P. According to the Wellhausen school, P represents the name "Jehovah" as first revealed in Exod. 6. 3; E in Exod. 3. 15; and J almost at the beginning of human history (cf. Gen. 4. 26). "Jehovah" is usually represented in our English Bible by the word "LORD" (in capitals); "Elohim" is usually translated "God".

Some have even gone so far as to suggest that the book, so plainly claiming the authority of Moses, was deliberately "planted" in the temple in order that it might be "accidentally" discovered and taken for what it purported to be. This conduct has been described as a "pious fraud". Apart from ethical considerations, the words of Professor W. F. Albright on this are noteworthy: "Biblical scholars have been misled by the analogy of Graeco-Roman antiquity into exaggerating the possibility of 'pious fraud' in the fabrication of written records and documents beyond all analogy . . . it cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is hardly any evidence at all in the ancient Near East for documentary or literary fabrications" (*From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940), p. 45).