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# Who Wrote Genesis ?

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THE Book of Genesis does not tell us who wrote it ; it does not mention its author's name. It is therefore, in the proper sense of the word, anonymous. But that does not mean that nothing can be known about its authorship, and it is our business now to try to find out what can be known about it.

## The "Law of Moses"

When we consider the main sections into which the books of the Old Testament are to be divided, we very soon see that the first five books are closely related to each other and form a section by themselves. This has been recognized from a very early date, long before the birth of Christ. Indeed, the whole Old Testament was sometimes divided into two sections only—the first five books, and then all the others together. This division is indicated in such an expression as our Lord used when He said "Moses and the prophets" (e.g., Luke 16. 29, 31). "Moses" summarises the first five books ; "the prophets" are all the rest. Now, why are the first five books referred to by the name "Moses" ? Primarily, because they contain the law which, as all Scripture agrees, God gave to the people of Israel through Moses. This law is so important an element in these five books that they themselves, as a whole, are frequently called "the law of Moses", or, to use a Jewish term, "the five fifths of the law". Nowadays they are commonly referred to as the "Pentateuch".<sup>1</sup>

## The Wellhausen School

The dominant schools of Biblical criticism, however, for the last century and more, have denied that Moses could be the author of nearly so much as is ascribed to him in the Bible ; some, indeed, have denied that he had any part in the authorship of these books at all.

Now, the Bible does not assert that Moses wrote every word of its first five books. It is unlikely, to say the least, that he wrote the account of his own death in Deut. 34. Even if, as some Rabbis thought, he wrote that by the spirit of prophecy, what would be the meaning of the words : "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (verse 6) ? And we may well agree that later editions of his legislation might contain additions or interpretations, made under the inspiration of God to meet the requirements of later times. For a modern parallel, we may think of Sir Erskine May's



The name Cleopatra in Hieroglyphics.

*Parliamentary Practice*, the "Bible" of M.P.'s, which appeared in its 14th edition in 1946. The first edition was published in 1844, and the author has long since been dead, while his work has been expanded and modified in many ways, but it is still referred to as "Erskine May", and rightly so. So later expansions and applications in the Mosaic legislation would not remove the justification for calling these books "the law of Moses". But the dominant schools of criticism have gone very much farther than this, and have regarded practically the whole Pentateuch as having been written centuries later than the time of Moses. This is specially true of one very influential school, which is usually called after the German scholar Wellhausen, most of whose work was done in the second half of last century.

Nowadays we can trace a revulsion of feeling. There is a tendency to admit that there is much more early material in the Pentateuch than the schools of Wellhausen and others allowed. All readers of this article should study an excellent

<sup>1</sup> That is, "the five rolls", from Greek *pente* ("five") and *teuchos* ("a roll").

booklet entitled *How Moses Compiled Genesis: A Suggestion*, by J. Stafford Wright (Church Book Room Press, Ltd. 6d.). Mr. Wright states his belief "that if it were possible to wipe the slate clean and to start our investigation of the Pentateuch without seeing the books through the spectacles of Wellhausen, we should, on intellectual grounds, decide that Moses was the author".

### The witness of the Pentateuch

But let us come down to details. What exactly is Moses said to have written? What does the Pentateuch itself say? There are six places in the Pentateuch where Moses is said to have written something. (1) In Num. 33. 2 he is said to have written an itinerary of the children of Israel, a journal of "their goings

Deuteronomic legislation. (6) In Deut. 31. 19, 22 he is said to have written the song of Deut. 32.

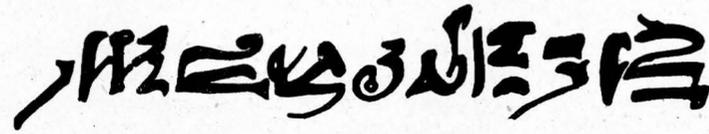
It would be foolish to think that Moses wrote no more than what he is explicitly said to have written. But could he have written even that? Certainly he could. Writing had been practised in Egypt and Mesopotamia since before 3000 B.C. A man "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" in Moses' time would have been equally conversant with the Egyptian hieroglyphic and hieratic scripts and with the Babylonian cuneiform or "wedge-shaped" script, which was employed for diplomatic correspondence. Besides, Moses lived at a time when all down the coast from North Syria to the Sinai Peninsula experiments were being made in alphabetic writing.

### A prolonged "hangover"

All this is common knowledge to-day, but the Biblical criticism which we have mentioned took shape at a time (in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) when it was widely believed that writing was not known even as

early as 1000 B.C. Therefore, some scholars assumed, Homer could not have written the Iliad and Odyssey, and Moses could not have written the Pentateuch. But while the conclusions based on such false premises have been given up in the realm of classical scholarship, their hang-over has unfortunately been longer in the realm of Biblical studies.

*To be continued.*



An example of hieratic script, a cursive hand much used by priests for reports and literary compositions.

out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD". (2) That this journal was more than a bare itinerary is suggested by Exod. 17. 14. There, after a defeat inflicted on the hostile Amalekites, God said to Moses: "Write this for a memorial in *the Book*" (for this is the literal rendering of the Hebrew, not "a book"). What, then, was "*the book*" in which Moses was told to write down the divine decree against Amalek? Probably it was this record of the journeyings of the Israelites in the wilderness. (3) In Exod. 24. 4 Moses is said to have written "all the words of the LORD" in "the book of the covenant" (as verse 7 calls it)—that is, the first law-code of Exod. 20-23. (4) In Exod. 34. 28 he is said to have written "upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments", this time possibly not the ten commandments of chapter 20, but the commandments in the preceding verses of Exod. 34. (5) In Deut. 31. 9, 24, Moses is said to have written the

"One of the most brilliant modern archaeologists, representing one of the greatest universities in the world, said in Iraq: 'I was brought up a "Higher Critic", and consequently disbelieved in the actual truth of the early narratives of the Bible. Since then I have deciphered thousands of tablets, and the more I learn, the more I believe the Bible to be true.'" (*New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis*—Wiseman. Marshall, Morgan & Scott. 6s.)