

Joseph and Moses
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The author of this volume is well-known to the public from his previous work, *How to Read the Prophets*, issued in five parts. The present work is a continuation of the same scheme. He attempts to place the history of Joseph and Moses before the reader in the plainest, popular form and at the same time to throw upon it as much historical light as is helpful for pointing its practical religious lessons. The similarity between the two publications will spring into view, if it be observed that the author places the Scripture account of the history of Joseph and Moses with which he deals entirely under the rubric of prophecy. Adopting the conclusions of modern criticism as to the late origin of the stories in their written coherent form, he proposes, naturally enough, to widen the designation *Prophetæ Anteriores* of the old Jewish canonists so as to make it cover these sections of the Pentateuch. Hence also he confines himself to J and E and leaves P entirely out of account. This Judæan and this Israelitish narrator were to all intents prophets, just as much as Amos and Hosea; they wrote from a prophetic point of view, and for a prophetic—i.e., practically religious—purpose. And the author works the favorite modern contention that the Bible gains immensely in practical religious usefulness if treated in this way, for all it is worth. Here historical insight and pious appreciation can meet and kiss each other. We cannot, however, shut our eyes to the fact that the reconciliation is effected at the expense of making the writers of the prophetic stories frankly indifferent as to the historical truth of the material they used for the inculcation of their prophetic principles. We would like to ask whether this is historically plausible. Does it not rather involve ascribing to them a thoroughly modern attitude of mind? Of course, no one denies that the Bible narratives were written for a religious purpose, and not for the purpose of teaching history as such. If such writers as J and E existed and wrote, they also will have written not in the first place as mere historians but as prophetic historians. But did they cease to be historians for that reason in their own consciousness? We think not. Whatever opinion we might hold as to the actual objective historicity of what they relate, we should, if we adopted J and E as real writers of the early prophetic period, still deem it necessary to insist upon the fact that they wrote in the naive faith of the historical character of the figures and events that move before us on their pages. It seems to us that every other view does violence to the inimitable simplicity of those stories. Of course, this criticism has a wide bearing which touches very vitally the question at issue between the advocates of the old and the modern critical views. If these prophetic writers mean to give history, though it be history for a religious purpose, and if what they give is not history in our modern judgment, what then remains of the contention that the new interpretation and appreciation of their work brings us closer to them than the old way of reading the Bible? So far as we can see, the only honest thing is to acknowledge that the modern critical attitude, when it evaporates the historicity of the ancient narratives, is fundamentally different from the attitude in which the Biblical authors recorded them, no matter whether the writers were J and E or Moses. To the inspired writers these histories had a specific historico-religious value apart from all the lessons they might teach in virtue of their moral or religious content. They were of supreme importance because they spoke of acts objectively done by God and experiences had by man, on which the whole structure of Israel's religious relation to God was built. It is the absence of this element, or at least the greatly decreased emphasis on it in the book before us and in all similar books, that most painfully affects us in reading them, notwithstanding the many excellent features they may otherwise possess. We have no doubt that the author posits a more or less substantial

objective revelation back of the popular stories which supplied the religious teachers with their texts, and yet he constantly speaks as if the revelation value of the record lay exclusively in the lesson which the history is made to teach, so that in the last analysis it would not make any essential difference whether the statements were history or legend or pure fiction. And with this is connected still another feature frequently observable in modern literature of this type. If the narrative is not and professes not to be a record of objective historical facts, then the tendency will inevitably be to divest even the lessons found in it as much as possible of that specific evangelical soteriological character which requires for its indispensable background a supernatural history of redemption. The main stress is apt to be laid on general moral and religious principles, such as belong to the province of natural religion, rather than on the distinctive truths of special revelation. It must be acknowledged that in the author's subject, so far as the history of Joseph is concerned, there is a certain justification for this; but the same can hardly be said of the history of Moses. Here we should have preferred a more positive insistence on the principles of special revelation. And even in regard to the history of Joseph one might feel inclined to say with Hengstenberg, that it cannot be apprehended in its true light if it be merely placed in the rubric of providence and destiny of man. To this must be added that the author does not always plainly indicate what constitutes for him the historical kernel in the stories from which he makes the prophetic writers draw their lessons. Occasionally he appears to waver between the personal and tribal interpretation of such names as Judah and Joseph, or in an indistinct manner to combine the two meanings. This cannot but be perplexing to the popular reader, and the reader more initiated into the critical problems lying back of such statements will feel that it is impossible at one and the same time to occupy both positions. We do not, however, wish these strictures, connected with the critical standpoint of the author, to interfere with our expression of the pleasure we have found in reading his instructive and always vivid exposition of the narrative. The list of words characteristic of each document, at the end of the volume, would in our opinion have better been omitted, as it is somewhat out of place in a book pursuing a popular and practical purpose.