

THE GROWTH OF THE HEXATEUCH

broken existence until his own day. This little narrative was accordingly irreconcilable with the story of the Flood (Gen. 6:5-9:19), one strand of which was also derived from J.

This is but one of the numerous internal inconsistencies which Wellhausen observed. not only in J but also in E and P. They were evidence that the original documents had, each of them, undergone elaboration before being combined into a single narrative. These successive strata of material Wellhausen represented by the symbols J¹, J², E¹, E², P¹. etc. He was, however, careful to insist upon the provisional character of his conclusions, and left most points of detail to be determined by future investigation.

Wellhausen was followed by Karl Budde,¹⁸ who argued that the J narrative in Gen. 1-11 was composed of two originally independent documents which had been woven together by a redactor. Kuenen¹⁹ likewise recognized divergent accounts of the earliest generations of men in the J material in these chapters, though he was inclined to dissent from Budde's theory of two originally independent documents. He was of the opinion that the inconsistencies, not only in these chapters but in the rest of the J document, were due to the systematic elaboration of one basic narrative. The E material in the Hexateuch, he maintained, had been similarly elaborated—a theory which was further developed by Otto Procksch²⁷ some years later.

In the quarter of a century following the appearance of Kuenen's treatise on the Hexateuch the study of the separate documents did little more than confirm the fact to which Wellhausen had called attention—that before they had been combined into a single narrative the original documents had in each case been expanded by the introduction of secondary material. The historical circumstances which had given rise to these revisions, the purpose for which they had been undertaken, and the nature of the process by which they had been carried through remained, however, undetermined. A growing disagreement inevitably resulted, not only as to the extent of the supplementary material and, in some cases, as to its affinity, but also as regards the primary form of the documents themselves, the outlines of which, particularly of J and E, became less and less distinct.

Indeed, Hermann Gunkel, in his great and

¹⁸ *Die biblische Urgeschichte* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1883).

¹⁹ *An Historico-critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch*, tr. P. H. Wicksteed (London: Macmillan & Co., 1886).

²⁷ *Das nordhebräische Sagenbuch: die Elohimquelle* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906).

epoch-making commentary on Genesis,¹⁸ explicitly maintained that it was impossible to answer such questions in detail. Following Budde, he distinguished two independent strands in the J narrative of chs. 1-11; similarly, he found two independent strands in the J material dealing with the patriarchs, though he was unable to decide whether or not these were continuous with the strands in the earlier chapters. He was inclined to regard the question as of little importance, for his interest was in the individual units—myths, legends, poems, genealogical tables, and notices—of which the documents were composed. It was to these that he directed his attention.

Through his brilliant and penetrating analysis Gunkel achieved certain results of fundamental importance: (a) he established once and for all the diverse and independent origins of the literary units which make up the source documents of Genesis; (b) he demonstrated that their present form was in most cases the result of gradual growth and adaptation; (c) he revealed the frequently intricate process by which legends of non-Israelite provenance had become an integral part of the Israelite tradition; and (d) he made clear the fact that the tradition in its final form was complex in the extreme—the product of centuries of assimilation and development of material drawn from many sources.

A few years later Hugo Gressmann,¹⁹ applying Gunkel's techniques to the account of the Exodus and the events which followed, threw fresh light upon the narrative of the remaining books of the Pentateuch.

Nevertheless, the work of these two scholars was not pure gain, for in reviving (albeit in modified form) the fragment-hypothesis and the supplementation-hypothesis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they inevitably tended to overlook the fact that the growth and development of the national tradition had been conditioned by political events—such as, for example, the formation and extension of intertribal confederacies—and to underestimate, therefore, the extent to which the articulation of the tradition had been a process consciously and deliberately undertaken.²⁰

Now, it must be realized that if the J and E documents should turn out to be not carefully articulated historical narratives—however legendary much of their content may be—but merely collections of legends and other material, so loosely put together that it is frequently doubt-

¹⁸ *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901; "Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament").

¹⁹ *Mose und seine Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913).

²⁰ For instances of Gunkel's failure in this respect see Simpson, *Early Traditions of Israel*, pp. 46-47.