

**THE EARLY NARRATIVES
OF GENESIS: A BRIEF
INTRODUCTION TO THE
STUDY OF GENESIS I-XI**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649507559

The Early Narratives of Genesis: A Brief Introduction to the Study of Genesis I-XI by Herbert Edward Ryle

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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EARLY NARRATIVES
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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY
OF GENESIS I.-XI.

BY

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London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1892

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TO MY WIFE

PREFACE

THE doubts and questionings to which the *Early Narratives of Genesis* have frequently given rise are well known to those who have any acquaintance with the religious difficulties of our own time. They, indeed, have been fortunate in their experience who have not known an instance in which antagonism or indifference to religion has been fostered by the rigid refusal, on the part of well-meaning Christian parents and teachers, to admit the possibility of an alternative to the traditional interpretation of this portion of Scripture.

Groundless as the supposition was, that a Christian when he reads the Book of Genesis must either renounce his confidence in the achievements of scientific research or abandon his faith in Scripture, it was, at one time, as widely prevalent as it was mischievous and false. Happily, in the present day, such a monstrous perversion of Christian freedom has long since disappeared; and it is generally, at

least tacitly, acknowledged, that if Biblical exegesis fails to march with the intellectual progress of the age, the Church of Christ will pay the penalty by forfeiting her hold upon the intelligence of those to whom she ministers.

None, I suppose, who think and read for themselves, can for one moment doubt, that the triumphs of discovery in the domain of Natural Science, during the last half-century, have strongly and deeply, though silently, been influencing the thoughts of thousands of devout Christians in reference to the opening chapters of Genesis. And there are not wanting signs that the interpretation of the Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions and the recognition of the province of Biblical Criticism have, in different ways, contributed to intensify this influence.

It is most true, and it is good to be reminded, that Science is never stationary. We are far indeed from hearing the last word upon the great problems of Natural Philosophy, Assyriology, and Biblical Criticism. Still, enough has been firmly established for all human purposes, to make it impossible that the exegesis of Genesis, if it is to be a living force, should remain where it was a century ago. What is now known, may not be perfect knowledge. But it were pure madness not to make a reverent use of our partial knowledge.

The old position is no longer tenable. A new

position has to be taken up at once, prayerfully chosen, and hopefully held. The period of transition, the period of anxious suspense of judgment, is drawing to a close. It is seen and felt that the interpretation of Holy Scripture is not less literal, not less spiritual, not less in conformity with the pattern which the Divine Teacher gave, when it is rendered more true to history by the fiery tests of criticism and literary analysis.

Some there are who gladly avow their belief that Scripture and Science are not at variance, yet are loth enough to make use of Science as God's gift. But, undoubtedly, it must be the maxim of all reverent exposition to treat Science as the friend and not as the foe of Divine Revelation. It may be that Science seems to be but a disappointing friend when it shows the path of traditional interpretation to be no longer practicable. But the utterance of truth is the proof of purest friendship; and Science, if it closes one way, guides us to another which hitherto has been hid from view.

The present volume consists of eight papers based on a course of Lectures delivered at Cambridge in 1890-91. They are reproduced with a few slight alterations from the *Expository Times*, to which Magazine they were contributed at the request of its kind and energetic Editor.