



9.20.02

Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

Presented by Prof. B.B. Warfield, D.D.

Division SCC

Section 2429

v. 4

The North American Review. Jan'y 1874

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL AND MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

BY THE REV. CHARLES A. BRIGGS, D. D.

THE Sunday-school is a modern institution, springing up as one of the fruits of that revival of religion in Great Britain and America which is called Methodism. The origin of the modern Sunday-school is generally found in the efforts of Robert Raikes, at Gloucester, England, in 1780. Long prior to this, schools of various kinds for the religious instruction of children on Sunday had been in operation in England, Scotland, Germany, Bohemia, and especially in Milan, where the pious Archbishop Charles Borromeo had established them in the middle of the sixteenth century. But these were local or provisional enterprises. The effort of Raikes was the beginning of a world-wide movement. It is interesting to note that Eichhorn, the father of the Higher Criticism of Holy Scripture, published the first edition of his *Introduction to the Old Testament* in 1780. The work of Eichhorn was also preceded by the preparatory labors of Herder, Astruc, Lowth, Simon, and other investigators. These two great movements of our age, the practical movement of the Sunday-school and the scholarly movement of the Higher Criticism, beginning in the very same year, the one in the heart of England, the other in the heart of Germany, have pursued each its independent course, each thriving chiefly in the land of its birth; but now at last the two movements have come together, and it has become a burning question, What shall be the relation between them?

The Sunday-school has as its aim to give religious instruction, primarily in Holy Scripture; secondarily, in the Catechisms of the Church. The primary aim of the Sunday-school cannot be accomplished without the aid of Biblical Criticism, for Biblical

Criticism searches Holy Scripture in order to test its truths and facts, to verify them, and to discriminate between them and the theories which have been formulated about them. Biblical Criticism brings the student near to the original Bible, so that it becomes more real, more vivid, more lively, and so more impressive and attractive. These are the very qualities of the Bible which enable the Sunday-school teacher to understand it, and which impart to him the ability to teach it to his scholars. The harmonious combination of these two great enterprises of our century will accomplish an enormous gain for the study of the Bible in the Christian Church.

For nearly eighteen centuries the Christian Church marched through history winning its greatest triumphs without the help of the Sunday-school. It accomplished the most essential parts of the work of the Sunday-school by catechetical schools of various kinds conducted by pastors and their helpers. These catechetical schools date from the beginnings of the Christian Church; they were involved in the Christian sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, and the training necessary for participation in them. It was largely owing to the multiplication of sects in Great Britain and America and the immense numbers of children who were brought up by their parents without baptism and entirely apart from churchly influences that made the Sunday-school a necessity. The need of the Sunday-school has not been so great in those countries where there are few if any dissenting sects and where all the children are baptized and are expected at the proper time to undergo the training necessary for confirmation.

The usefulness of the Sunday-school is also involved in the question of religious education in the Common School. On the continent of Europe, in most countries, religious instruction is given in the national schools, or in parochial schools. Under these circumstances Sunday-schools have little place. But in the United States of America, where religious instruction is banished from the common schools, where else shall the religious instruction be imparted to the children who attend the common schools unless in the Sunday-school?

The American Sunday-school has, in most cases, to comprehend all the problems of religious instruction that are involved [1] in the daily religious instruction of parochial schools and of

the national schools of Europe ; [2] in the catechetical training for confirmation ; [3] in the special work of the Sunday-school itself. All of these great tasks are to be accomplished in the American Sunday-school in the limited time of one hour on Sundays. The American Sunday-school does not succeed in these tasks. It cannot. Practically it limits itself in most cases to its own special work. That is the reason why wise pastors insist upon having catechetical classes of their own. That is the reason why thinking men of other denominations than the Roman Catholic are urging that in some way religious instruction should be given in common schools.

The teachers of parochial schools and of national schools are well trained. They are required to undertake special preparatory studies, and to sustain examinations which will qualify them and accredit them as competent teachers. The classes in preparation for confirmation are ordinarily conducted by thoroughly educated pastors. But the teachers of Sunday-schools are commonly pious young people who have had little, if any, training in the art of teaching or in Biblical study or in the doctrines or customs of their Church, and whose qualifications have not been tested by examinations. The actual situation is that for five days of the week the children are taught by experienced, well-trained, and approved teachers in all the common studies of our schools ; but on Sunday they are taught for a single hour, too often by inexperienced and untrained teachers, in the most sacred matters of our holy religion. Many efforts have been made by earnest Sunday-school workers to give teachers the preparation which they need to meet their classes ; but this can be accomplished only by a comprehensive and thorough enterprise conducted on sound principles of education. The most hopeful movement in recent times is the organization of the Bible Study Union to encourage the use of the Blakeslee Graded Lessons. The difficulty of the situation is that the most of the lesson helps, which have been examined by the writer, contain a large amount of crude, undigested material ; good, bad, and indifferent statements mingled without discrimination ; traditional opinions, speculative apologetics, and mere guesses, presented as if they were the truth of God ; anything and everything which may be used for illustrating the lesson, with indifference whether it corresponds with truth or fact. If such rubbish is to be taught in the American

Sunday-school the word of God contained in Holy Scripture will hardly emerge through it.

The International Lessons for 1894, used in the most of the American Sunday-schools, cover ground which, more than any other, comes into relation with modern Biblical criticism. The lessons for the first half of the year are in the books of Genesis and Exodus; for the second half of the year in the Gospels. These come in contact with the Lower Criticism, the Higher Criticism, Historical Criticism, and Biblical Theology. It is difficult to see how any except teachers in the more elementary classes can avoid these departments of criticism. It is doubtful whether this selection of lessons was wise in view of the great agitation of the public mind of several denominations about Biblical criticism. It is doubtful whether the attention of all Sunday-school teachers and children should have been called to these questions in the most difficult of all fields, for the next six months. But it is now too late for doubts and regrets. The American Sunday-school is now obliged to face the questions of Biblical criticism.

1. Textual criticism has to determine, by the study of manuscripts, versions, citations, and the laws of transmission, what was the exact original text of Holy Scripture. The Sunday-school depends upon translations from the original text. Which translation shall be followed, the Common Version or the Revised Version? or shall the teacher and student compare the two and make his choice between them? Shall he take into consideration the readings of the ancient versions given in the margin of the Revised Version or refuse to consider them? Shall he take account of the readings suggested by the best modern critics as carefully collected in the *Variorum Bible*? Just as soon as the teacher or scholar deviates in any respect from the Common Version, he, to the extent of his deviations, enters into the work of Textual Criticism. If he is not content to rest on the Common Version, is he competent to decide himself between the two versions without evidence? He must, therefore, in all honesty, go to the margin of the Revised Version; he will act wisely if he resort to the *Variorum Bible*, where the names of the principal authorities are given for every variation, and there is room for discrimination.

2. The higher criticism has to determine these four questions:

(a) The integrity; (b) the authenticity; (c) the literary style; and (d), the credibility of the writing. It is difficult to see how these questions can be avoided in the study of Genesis and Exodus.

(a) Who wrote Genesis and Exodus? This question will be asked in the American Sunday-schools this coming year as never before. The lesson helps, many of them, state the traditional opinion that Moses wrote these books, without modification. Some state that Moses used older documents and so compiled the books. But other lesson helps recognize that Biblical criticism has shown that Moses did not write these books and that the author is unknown. The teachers and scholars will often be perplexed by this difference of opinion. When they turn away from their lesson helps to the larger works upon the Bible, they will see that Biblical critics are practically unanimous in their opinions on this question. It matters little if a few American professors, in theological seminaries renowned for their extreme conservatism, hold the traditional opinion, when the majority of American Biblical scholars agree with all the professional teachers of the Old Testament in all the universities of Protestant Europe that Moses did not write Genesis or Exodus. The student turns to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and to the new edition of Smith's *Biblical Dictionary* and to the *Cambridge Bible for Sunday-schools* and to the *Commentaries* and critical works of the most famous scholars of modern Europe, and finds them all agreeing that Moses did not write the books of Genesis and Exodus. If the Sunday-school teachers are content to state the facts, that the traditional opinion is that Moses wrote the Pentateuch; that modern criticism holds that he did not write these books; but that the question is unimportant for the religious lessons of these books; he may reserve his own opinion and that of his scholars with safety. But if he undertakes a polemic against Modern Criticism in the interests of the traditional theory, and makes the question a test of orthodoxy, the divisions and heartburning which are among the ministers will arise among the Sunday-school teachers and scholars; and if he should pursue the unwise course commended by some ultra-conservative teachers and maintain that if Moses did not write Genesis it cannot be inspired, it is altogether probable that not a few teachers and scholars may be forced into a dilemma and be compelled to give up the inspiration of the book. There is no danger of this in those parts of our country where

Biblical criticism is known and valued. The peril will arise in reactionary schools where ultra-conservatism prevails.

(b) The Sunday-school teacher will be unable to avoid the question of the integrity of the book of Genesis. The question is raised in many of the lesson helps. It matters little that the most of them raise the question of earlier documents in order to deny them. The teachers and scholars will examine into this matter for themselves. They will see that the documentary theory is recognized as the established doctrine of criticism in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible and in the Cambridge Bible for Sunday-Schools. Some of them will look at the documents as they are separated by Driver, Bacon, Harper, and others, and they will decide for themselves.

It is noteworthy that the International Lessons for 1894 seem to have been chosen with the analysis of Driver in view. There are three documents in Genesis: The Ephraimitic document (*E*), written in the northern kingdom of Samaria; the Judaic document (*J*), written in the southern kingdom of Judah, and the later priestly document (*P*). We give in parallel columns the selections from Genesis and the corresponding ones from the Gospels in order to show that, consciously or unconsciously, the compilers of these lessons have selected from the different documents of the Pentateuch very much in the same way as they have selected from the four Gospels.

Gen. I. 26-31; II. 1-3. P.	Luke II. 1-16.
“ III. 1-15 J.	Luke II. 25-38.
“ IV. 3-13 J.	Matthew II. 1-12.
“ IX. 8-17 P.	Matthew II. 13-23.
“ XII. 1-9 J [except 4 b-5 P].	Luke II. 40-52.
“ XVII. 1-9 P.	Mark I. 1-11.
“ XVIII. 22-33 J.	Matthew IV., 1-11.
“ XXI. 1-13 E.	John I. 35-49.
“ XXV. 27-34 J.	John II. 1-11.
“ XXVIII. 10-22 J E [mixed].	John II. 13-25.
“ XXXII. 9-12, 24-30 J.	Luke IV. 16-30.
“ XXXVII. 1-11 E [except 1-2 a P.]	Luke V. 1-11.
“ XXXVII. 23-36 J E [mixed].	Mark I. 21-34.
“ XLI. 38-48 E [except 46 P].	Mark II. 1-12.
“ XLV. 1-15 E.	Mark II. 23-28; III. 1-5.
“ L. 14-26 E. [except 14 J].	Mark III. 6-19.

Only two of these passages from Genesis contain a mixed text—XXVIII. 10-22 and XXXVII. 23-36—where *J* and *E* are mingled. In XXXVII. 1-11, L. 14-26, the opening verses came from another document. But these were used because necessary to the connection. In XII. 1-9 and XLI. 38-48, historic inser-

tions from *P* are used because it would be difficult to leave them out. The lessons, therefore, give specimens from the documents fairly well in accordance with Driver's Analysis. From Matthew three passages are given; from the priestly document, three; from Mark and Luke, five passages each; from *J*, six passages, and from *E*, five passages; from John, three passages; from the mixed text of *J E*, two passages. A careful reader of the English versions will note differences which shine through these various documents, and these differences will be as striking in the documents of Genesis as in the documents of the Gospel.

(*c*) The literary style of the story of Genesis cannot be altogether ignored. The question will often be asked in the Sunday-schools whether the earlier chapters of Genesis are real historical narratives or whether they contain historic facts embellished by legend, myth, or tradition; whether the poetic imagination is chiefly responsible for the story of creation and of paradise, and of the antediluvians and patriarchs, endeavoring to teach the most important lessons of the origin of the world, of man, and of sin, in beautiful pictures which are easily understood; or whether the logical faculty gives exact reproductions of the truths and facts imparted by divine revelation or derived from human authorities. The question will also be raised whether the authors use the style of historical prose, or of lyric, epic, or didactic poetry. It may not be easy to answer any of these questions with sufficient decision to give satisfaction to the inquiring mind. If, however, the teacher can show to the scholar that these questions have only to do with the literary form of the documents, and that the religious instruction contained in them is independent of the literary form, he will concentrate attention upon the religious instruction of these early books of Holy Scripture, and derive from them the lessons which the Sunday-school ought chiefly to learn.

(*d*) The most serious question the Sunday-school will have to confront is the question of credibility. This question depends to a large extent upon the other questions which have been considered. The Sunday-school teacher should be careful lest he risk the credibility of Genesis with the assertion of its Mosaic authorship. He should teach that many of the best modern critics deny the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and yet maintain its credibility. It is not so clear that the name of Moses is a better attestation for the credibility of Gene-

sis than the anonymous writers of later times ; for the final compiler of Genesis used three great original documents and compacted them together. These three documents are three independent witnesses who themselves used older documents and sources for their authority. Marshall's *Life of Washington* is by no means so credible an authority as Bancroft's *History of the United States* ; for though Marshall is much nearer to the events, he had not such extensive sources of information and he lacked the critical sagacity and historic skill of Bancroft. We have evidence that Moses was a prophet and a lawgiver, but what evidence have we that he was an historian ?

The question of credibility depends still more upon the literary form of the narrative. If it should be maintained that the story of the Creation and the Fall are plain historical narratives, and that therefore we must believe that God created the world in six days of twenty-four hours, and that He then rested on the seventh day and consecrated it to be the Sabbath of rest from that time onward ; and that an animal serpent conversed with Eve and seduced her to eat of a forbidden fruit and so introduced sin and death into the world ; then it will be exceedingly difficult to convince many of the Sunday-school teachers and scholars that these narratives are altogether credible. If it should be said that there has been some poetic embellishment of these stories ; that the days are periods and that the rest of God from further creation in the seventh period is the basis for the subsequent establishment of the weekly sabbath ; that the serpent was really an evil spirit, the devil, and that it was not so much the fruit of the tree as the disobedience and lack of faith in God that brought sin and evil into the world ; then the narrative becomes more credible in some respects ; but at the expense of its consistency and harmony. If these stories are regarded as works of the imagination, poetic in structure and poetic in conception ; if the days are simply the framework to set forth the general orderliness and progressiveness of the creation ; the seventh day the appended conception of a later prose writer using the poem of the creation as the basis for the sabbath of the priestly law ; if the story of the serpent and the tree are poetical pictures of that mysterious event, the first entrance of sin into the world ; then the great spiritual lessons of the creation and the original sin of man stand out in attractive beauty and power and bear witness to their own credibility. It is

really immaterial to these religious lessons how far the poetical embellishment of the stories may extend or how far it may be in accord with the actual facts of the case.

3. Historical criticism will meet the Sunday-school teacher in his study of the books of Genesis and Exodus. The lessons have been selected apparently with great skill, so as to avoid as many such questions as possible. This gives them the appearance of a hop, skip, and jump over chapters and verses in their course through the book of Genesis. But it is difficult to see how it is possible to avoid taking the neglected passages into consideration. The lesson on the creation is limited to the creation of man and the resting on the seventh day, and thus the most of the questions which spring up in the early chapters of Genesis in connection with modern science are avoided. The story of the deluge is passed over. The only reference to it is in connection with the Covenant with Noah. The Dispersion of the Nations is omitted. The selections from the story of Abraham and Jacob are those which come least into contact with external history. In the story of Joseph the one document *E* is closely adhered to, and in the story of the Exodus there seems to be a careful avoidance of difficulties. Nevertheless historical criticism must be faced in many of the passages.

(*a*) The story of the institution of the Passover in these lessons is taken from the story of *P* in Ex. XII., 1-14. But the parallel story of *J* is given in Ex. XII. 21-27, and is much simpler and more primitive in conception. It seems that the story of *P* has mingled with its narrative the more complex legislation of later times. This is confirmed by a study of the law codes where there are five different laws respecting the Passover showing development through the different codes: (1) Ex. XXIII. 18 *E*. (2) Ex. XXXIV. 25. *J*. (3) Deut. XVI. 2-7 *D*. (4) Num. IX. 12 *P a*. (5) Num. XXVIII. 16 *P b*. The narrative of *J* corresponds with the earlier code of *J*, the narrative of *P* with the later code of *P*.

(*b*) The story of the crossing of the Red Sea is given in Ex. XIV. 19-29, in which *E J* and *P* are all mingled in the compiled narrative of the final editor. The Song, Ex. XV., gives another poetic version of the story. There are several references to it in the Psalter and in the Prophets. A comparison of the different Hebrew representations gives a varied and complex

conception. It is not our purpose to distinguish here between the historical nucleus and the varied poetical embellishments or to urge the Sunday-school teacher and scholar to undertake this difficult task. There is a certain advantage in such an undertaking, because it enables the scholar to distinguish between the real and the ideal in Biblical history, and cautions him against the besetting sin in practical interpretation of exaggerating the importance of trivial and unimportant accessories to the neglect of the essential features of the narrative. But we have called attention to this lesson because it comes in contact with historical geography. The lesson omits the references to historic places in the previous context and limits our attention to the scene of crossing the Red Sea itself. It is probable that its northern arm in ancient times extended farther to the north than at present, and eminent authorities think that it included also the Bitter Lakes. But there is no agreement as to place of passage. It was probably a little below Suez, but several other places are contended for by scholars who are entitled to a hearing.

(c) Egyptian archæology sheds light upon the lesson, Ex. I. 1-14, with reference to the bondage of Israel in Egypt, through the recent investigation of the buried treasure cities upon which the Hebrews labored. But the lesson carefully avoids raising the difficult historical question of the length of the sojourn in Egypt and the date of the Exodus. Teachers and scholars may make an excursion into these regions of historical criticism, but they are not called so to do, and it would seem to be best to adhere to the path of religious instruction which has been marked out for them.

4. The International Lessons from Genesis raise some of the most difficult questions in Biblical Theology. These lessons spring out of the passages in their order. It is evident that there is a very great disproportion in the importance of the religious instruction given in these lessons. A glance at the following table will suffice :

[1] The creation of man and the seventh day's rest. Gen. I. 26-II., 3.	[1] Discord in Jacob's family. XXXVII. 1-11.
[2] The original sin and the original promise. Gen. III. 1-15.	[2] Joseph sold into Egypt. XXXVII. 23-36.
[3] The origin of sacrifice, and the fratricide. IV. 3-13.	[3] Joseph ruler in Egypt. XLI. 33-48.
[4] The covenant with Noah. IX., 8-17.	[4] Joseph forgiving his brethren. XLV. 1-15.
[5] The call and migration of Abram. XII. 1-9.	[5] Joseph's last days. L. 14-26.

Either more than five lessons should be given to the study of the first group of topics, or five lessons are too many for the relative importance of the second group. It may be that this disproportion inheres in any use of lessons from Holy Scripture itself. If this be so, it affords a strong argument in favor of textbooks for a harmonious and well-proportioned study of Biblical history and Biblical doctrine. But this difficulty might have been overcome, in a measure at least, by a larger and more detailed study of the twelve earlier chapters of Genesis. This would have been more profitable than such a hasty study of the fundamental facts of our holy religion. It was not necessary to append the question of the Sabbath to the study of the creation of man. There is peril lest the more practical question of the observance of the Sabbath may crowd the vastly more important doctrine of the creation of man. It would have been wiser to make two lessons out of the second, the one on the original sin, the other on the protevangelium, and even then the themes would be too vast for one hour of study.

The doctrine of the creation of man in the lesson from the first chapter of Genesis can hardly be successfully considered without the study of the creative acts of the previous days of creation; and certainly the story of the second chapter of Genesis will have to be studied likewise. The differences are here on the surface. In the one story mankind is created as a race, male and female, on the sixth day before the seventh day of rest dawns; in the other there is a long series of divine and human activities separated by events of transcendent importance, before the human race was produced. In the one story God creates by saying as a sovereign and commander; in the other he uses his hands and the breath of his nostrils as a workman and a benefactor. In the one story God blesses the race and assigns mankind his dominion and destiny; in the other God trains the man, the woman, and their children by personal, visible, and audible presence. In the one story man bears the image of God, and therefore is sovereign of nature; in the other, man's body is made of dust and his spirit of the breath of God; but inasmuch as the animals were made in the same way, the difference first appears by experiment when no helpmeet is found for the man from among the animals. When now to these differences is added different names of God, different terms for the vegetation and the animals,

and even for the two sexes of mankind, it is abundantly evident that we have two different stories and two different conceptions and representations of the creation of our race. If now the teacher can grasp the significance of these facts and apprehend that the mode of the creation of man is of small importance compared with the creation itself; if he has the discernment to see that the mode of the creation was not revealed to man by God; but was represented by different poets as they were enabled by the divine spirit to construct it by the use of their imagination and that these are pictorial representations of a divine act which could not be represented or described in its mysterious and unknowable reality, and that through these varied poetic embellishments the same essential doctrine shines; then the religious instruction, that man was created by God as the crown of nature, as the ruler of nature, and as the image and representative of God in person, character, activity, and entire life, will impress itself upon the scholars and teachers with freshness, vividness, and redemptive power. If modern science can give us a better description of the creation of man than the Hebrew poets, what matters it? They cannot give us any truer doctrine of the creation or of the relation of man to God and to nature than that given us in the early chapters of Genesis. If any one insists upon the mode of creation of the first chapter of Genesis, he will come in conflict with the mode of creation of the second chapter of Genesis, and either of them will bring him in conflict with the sure results of modern science. And if he insists upon the literal verbal representations what can he do with other parts of Holy Scripture such as Psalms XXXIII. and CIV., which give still other varying pictures of the creation, and with Proverbs VIII., Job XXXVIII., Amos IX., Isaiah XL.? If he insists upon it that the body of man was formed by God and his spirit inbreathed, how will he meet the objection from Zechariah XII. 1 where it is said that Yahweh "formeth the spirit of man within him"; and from Psalm XXXIII. 6, where all the hosts of heaven were made "by the breath of his mouth"; and from Psalm VIII. 3, where the heavens are the work of God's fingers; and from Ps. XIX. 1, where "the firmament sheweth his handiwork"? There are those who think that they can build a doctrine of creation out of a prosaic interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. They can do it only by shutting their eyes to the great variety of beautiful images under

which the creation of man and nature is taught, in many different passages of Scripture. There is only one way to reach a sound and reliable doctrine, and that is to seek for the essential instruction which underlies all these images, and beware lest we become absorbed in the coloring and tracteries of any one of them. This one example must suffice to show the vast importance of Biblical theology to the Sunday-school.

Modern Biblical criticism thus has a double work. It removes an immense amount of crude, indefinite, erroneous and false material which has commonly been brought into the Sunday-school to illustrate everything but the lesson and to dull its points. It presents a solid basis of truth and fact upon which religious lessons may be built that will be firm, reliable, and permanent. Those who teach without taking account of modern Biblical criticism teach a mass of material which will have to be unlearned in a few years to the accompaniment of sad and bitter experiences. Such teachers will have no thanks from their pupils—will have no reward for their services. The rewards of the future are with the faithful teachers who teach nothing but the truth and who search for it as for hid treasures; who in these days of battle between tradition and criticism calmly watch the issues, and, if they cannot decide between them, limit themselves to those matters about which there is no doubt. In those they find the religious instruction which is most suitable for the Sunday-school and which lies safely enshrined back of all human controversies, indestructible and eternal in its quickening truths and facts.

C. A. BRIGGS.

