

the ability to read and write has become common property, but because the culture itself is felt to be threatened—from within by syncretism, and from without by political events. This change occurred, for Judah, presumably towards the end of the seventh century, or at the beginning of the sixth, for northern Israel, perhaps a century and a half earlier" (pp. 60-61). Two results of all this mode of inquiry deserve mention. First, Old Testament literature possesses a much higher dependability than was formerly supposed; also it manifests a much higher unity. And second, the work of the literary critics rested on a false basis; we deal, not with documents adventitiously put together, but with masses of tradition, combined into literary works, if not entire books, by someone who was apparently a real author, not the mere editor postulated by the literary critics.

Yet as one proceeds with Nielsen's argument, the novelty and the uniqueness of the movement wear thin. As mentioned already he takes his departure from the work of Gunkel, which practically all literary critics accept. Almost from the beginning, too, it has been recognized that back of all Old Testament documents, except perhaps the later books, there lies an undefined period of oral transmission. Further, Nielsen admits the soundness of a considerable bulk of the critics' results and its usefulness to the traditio-historian. As well, everyone recognizes that our Old Testament books came to their final form through the activity of some individual, or a group so closely co-ordinated as to provide practically individual work; this individual assembled older materials into an expression of his own attitudes. The difference between all this and Nielsen's view is clearly one of degree where significance steadily evaporates. Comparison of sources to discover their agreement, hence their original nucleus, is also a tool of the literary critic quite as truly as of the traditionalist. I employed the method commonly in my study of Ezekiel, with no sense of indebtedness to the Scandinavians, but instead conscious that I was only employing approved critical procedure.

Nielsen's position, it will be apparent, rests on a theory of the illiteracy of the general pub-

lic in pre-exilic times. It is a large issue, where generalizations are of little use. His survey of available evidence, excellent as it is, yet remains less than exhaustive. He ignores the strange statement in Judg. 8:14 that a certain young man, apparently a chance peasant picked up by Gideon's soldiers, "wrote" the princes of Sukkoth for them. Hebrew was fully adequate to saying that he "described" the princes, if that is all that is meant. Similar is Nielsen's oversight of the writing on the Lachish ewer; its crude character has long been presented as evidence of a general, not merely scribal, literacy in that early period. One must comment too that Nielsen's use of the famous passage in Lachish letter No. 3 is more than dubious. He quotes the translations of both Torczyner and Albright and deduces the conclusion "that writing belonged to the craftsman . . . and that even men of authority were—or could be conceived of as—illiterate" (p. 56). But surely Torczyner's translation clearly implies that the officer with whom the author of the letter corresponded fully believed the latter could read. And by Albright's rendering this same author declares his independence of scribes, i.e., he could handle correspondence without them. Nielsen's discussion of correspondence in general likewise disturbs one. He makes much of the use of the verb "hear" in regard to such written communication, deducing that the message was delivered orally; the letter was only a sort of *aide memoir* for the messenger. But surely this evidences a lack of imagination! The wording is as devoid of significance as our modern use of the verbs say and tell, when we actually mean that we have written the information.

Nielsen tells us that the traditio-historian is engaged in the same task as the literary critic, "namely a correct and true placing of the separate Old Testament texts." His distinction is that he "is undoubtedly more reverent toward tradition . . . he believes the creators of our written Old Testament capable of better things than mere editorial clumsiness . . . and so he attempts with all his might to reach an understanding of the sensible motives that asserted themselves in the formation of large complexes of traditions" (p. 63).