

The History of Moses

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By Robert Louis Stevenson

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Title: The History of Mose

Author: Robert Louis Stevenson

Language: English

Subject: Fiction, Literature, Children's literature

Publisher: World Public Library Association

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RAY OIL BURNER COMPANY
SAN FRANCISCO
NEW YORK



*Israelites going out of
Egypt.*

ISRAELITES GOING OUT OF EGYPT

The History of Moses

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

PRIVATELY PRINTED

A. EDWARD NEWTON
"OAK KNOLL"
DAYLESFORD, PENNSYLVANIA
1919

History of Moses

There was a woman that had a child when all the babies were to be drowned & she was a good woman & she asked God how she could save her baby & God told her to make a basket of rushes & put it in the water hiding it in the rushes. Then Pharaoh's daughter was going to bathe in a certain place & as she went past she saw the cradle & asked

R. Lewis B. Stevenson

A reward for his history of Moses with illustrations

From his affectionate Aunt David

Christmas 1856



Inscription in "The Happy Sunday Book."

In the month of November, 1914, there was exhibited at the Grolier Club in New York City a collection of first editions of the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, together with some small but choice examples of Stevensoniana. Item No. 250 of this exhibition was a tiny blank book in which Stevenson, as a child of six, wrote his Bible lessons and texts in large printed characters. It is aptly described as a "Text Book" signed R. L. B. S. 1856, and it is obviously a manuscript of Stevenson's earliest childhood. But it is not the first work of his genius or imagination: It is the first work of his hand but not of his mind.

By the chance of the auction room I was recently fortunate enough to secure through the courtesy of Gabriel Wells, the bookseller of New York, the original draft of what seems to be Stevenson's earliest literary composition, dictated by him at the age of six in the handwriting of his mother. The story of the manuscript of Stevenson's first book will be interesting to all lovers of Stevenson—and who is not?—and may here be briefly told.

In 1856 Stevenson's Uncle David offered to his children and nephews a prize for the best history of Moses. Louis, then a child of only six years, was allowed to try for it, by dictating his version to his mother, and to this he devoted five successive Sunday evenings. He won the prize, and, adds his mother, "From that time it was the desire of his heart to be an author."

Stevenson himself in later years attributed much of his desire for writing to the childhood stories told him by his nurse, Alison Cunningham, and to her reading to him "the works of others as a poet would scarce dare to read his own."

In the volume of notes on Stevenson kept by his mother, she makes the following entry regarding the manuscript: "It was begun on Nov. 23d and finished Dec. 21st; he

dictated every word himself on the Sunday evenings—the only help I gave him was occasionally to read aloud to him from the Bible to refresh his memory.” The story now appears in print for the first time.

The manuscript is entirely in the handwriting of Stevenson’s mother and is signed by him R. L. B. Stevenson, the B. standing for Balfour; he was christened Robert Lewis Balfour. In addition to the manuscript of twenty-three pages, there are eight pages of pencil sketches colored in water-colors entirely in design and execution the work of the boy himself.

A facsimile page of Mrs. Stevenson’s manuscript is given, together with a facsimile of one of the illustrations in color, entitled “Israelites Going Out of Egypt.” Accompanying the manuscript as it came to me is the Bible Picture Book presented to Stevenson as the prize for his successful effort. An inscription in his uncle’s handwriting reads: “R. Lewis B. Stevenson. A Reward for his History of Moses, with illustrations. From his affect. Uncle David, Christmas 1856.”

When it is remembered that the drawings with their colorings and the text, although in the handwriting of his mother, is the thought of the child expressed in his own words, it will be realized that this unique and unpublished memento of Stevenson’s childhood days cannot fail to appeal, not only to all Stevenson collectors, but to all who feel an interest in the earliest manifestation of genius. It will be observed that the spelling of the name as it appears in the inscription is Lewis; later he changed the spelling to Louis. The pronunciation of the word has always been the same.

A. EDWARD NEWTON.

“Oak Knoll”
Daylesford, Penna.
June 15, 1919

HISTORY OF MOSES

There was a woman that had a child when all the babies were to be drowned and she was a good woman and she asked God how she could save her baby and God told her to make a basket of rushes and put it in the water hiding it in the rushes. Then Pharaoh's daughter was going to bathe in a certain place and as she went past she saw the cradle and asked her servants to go and bring it out and they did it. When they brought it out they lifted the thing up that was on the top and they saw a baby crying. Then they saw the child's sister that was standing far away and Pharaoh's daughter cried to her to come and when she came she told her to call a nurse for the baby and then she ran and brought the mother of it and she told the mother to take charge of it and to come to the palace and so she came.

Then Moses when he was grown up was sent away to show some wonders to the Israelites and God told him the things he was to do. He first told him to lay down his rod and when he laid it down it became a serpent. Then he told him to go and do it when he was with the Israelites and he said he would do it. Then God told him to put his hand into his breast and he did so and his hand became a leper, then he pulled it out and he put it in again and when he pulled it out it was just the way it was before. Then God told him to do that and he went away home to the house that he lived in and God told him that he would have to go to the Israelites. Then he went away to the Israelites.

One day Moses saw a Egyptian whipping a Israelite and he came and killed the Egyptian. It was not wrong of Moses to kill the Egyptian because he was doing harm to the Israelite for he was an Israelite too. After that God told Aaron and Moses to go up and try to make Pharaoh let the Israelites go away and then Aaron and Moses went up to speak to him and asked him if he would allow them to go and Pharaoh said no that he wouldn't. Then Aaron laid down the rod and behold it became a serpent. He took it by the tail and pulled it up and it turned into a rod. He put his hand into his breast and it became a leper and he put it in again and it was just as it was before. Then the Egyptians took all their rods and laid them down and they became serpents. Pharaoh said he would let them go but he hardened his heart and would not. When Pharaoh was going to bathe at a certain place Aaron stretched his rod over the water and it became blood. Then Pharaoh went home in despair and he said he would let them go but he hardened his heart again. Then Aaron stretched out his rod and frogs came forth and crept over all the beds and eat up all the food and everything and he said he would let them go but he hardened his heart again.

Then the next plague was little insects called lice which went all over the country. After that he sent swarms of flies which buzzed about in the most horrible manner. Then boils came all over the people even over Pharaoh and his servants. After that came deaths of beasts and nearly all the beasts died. Then God sent hail and rain and fire and thunder and before he sent it he told Pharaoh and all his people to keep in their

houses. After that it happened all the grass was taken away and all the leaves off the trees by locusts. Then it turned all darkness and it was all light beside the Israelites. And God said to the Israelites that they must all get ready and stand round a table eating a lamb and spread the blood of the lamb on the lintels of their doors for that the angel of death was going to pass to kill all the babies but whoever has the blood on the lintels wouldn't have their babies killed. Then when the Egyptians had gone to bed thinking of no danger, the angel of death passed through and every baby even Pharaoh's first born was killed and there was a great cry over all the land. Then Pharaoh cried for Moses and Aaron as quickly as possible and he said that they must go away as fast as they could and they all went and took their bags of meat and their flocks and they asked the women of Egypt to give them some gold and silver and they did so.

They came to a sea called the Red Sea, now don't suppose it was red like blood, so the black cloud stood still that had led them all the way and they encamped and soon they heard a great noise of horses and chariots and it was the Egyptians coming after them. They then told Moses to go and pray to God and he did so. Then God told Moses to stretch out his rod over the Red Sea and he did so. Lo and behold the waters went up on each side of a dry path like walls, then the Israelites went into the path to cross. After they had got a little way across the Egyptians came up and they saw a dry path and they determined to go over it. They had not got very far across when lo and behold to their terror the

wheels of their chariots stuck like as if in mud as God poured down his wrath and the thunder roared and such lightnings as were never seen in Egypt (this is in line upon line). God told Moses to stretch his rod over the water and he did so and the walls of water came down upon the tops of the Egyptians and they were drowned.

Then the Israelites were very hungry and they began to speak to Moses about it. Then Moses prayed to God and God told Moses that the Israelites were to get up very early in the morning and they would see small white things on the ground and they were to gather it but they were not to gather any for tomorrow because it would breed worms and stink and they could not eat it but on Saturdays they were to gather some for Sundays because on Sundays they would not see any little white things. So they rose up early in the morning and they went out and they did see little white things and they called it manna. It tasted like honey. Then they were very thirsty and they murmured against Moses and against God and so Moses went to pray to God and God told Moses to go up to a rock with a few men and to strike the rock with his rod and water would come out, so he did so and water came flowing forth. Then they travelled on through the wilderness and they came to a mount called Sinai. God told Moses to come up to him in the mount and Moses went up. God told Moses that he was to tell the Israelites to wash their clothes for they were to hear him speaking on the third day. They did so and on the third morning they heard his voice and the trumpet sounded loud. And he was to put railings round the mountain and he was not to let

any of the people touch the mountain or the railings. Moses stayed forty days and forty nights with God and God gave him two tables of stone with ten commandments written on them and the Israelites thought the time so long they thought he was never to come back so they asked Aaron to make them a golden calf. He told them to give all their gold earrings and things so he melted them and took it out and when it was soft he cut it into the shape of a calf. Then he took it and put it upon a high place and he said they should have a great feast tomorrow and so they had a grand feast and they danced round the calf and cried, "This is the one who brought us out of Egypt" and Moses was coming down at that time and he saw the Israelites dancing round the image and he broke the tables of stone because he was so angry and he came down very quickly and took the calf and melted it and ground it into powder and threw it into some water and made them drink it and God said that somebody must take a sword and kill some of them and Moses asked God not to kill the whole of them and said, "Remember what you promised to Jacob."

Then Moses went up into the mount again and God told him to make a tabernacle and he told him of two clever men which could help them to carve wood and things. Their names were Bezaleel and Aholiab. When Moses went down they could not look upon him because he shone with the glory of God and he put a veil over his face. Then he told the Israelites that they were to make a tabernacle for God and Moses asked them for their gold and silver and all their beautiful things to make it of and they gave them. In the court of the

tabernacle, there was a brazen altar for offering lambs and oxes upon and there was a brazen basin a little farther in, in which the priests used to wash the dishes and their hands. Then in the inside in the holy place there was a golden altar for burning incense on and a candlestick which had seven lamps upon it. Then draw up the veil of the tabernacle, you will see the Holy of Holies and in it a large box of gold, the top of it was called the Mercy Seat and there was two gold angels that bent their wings over the top, in the inside there was Aaron's budding rod and the tables of stone. The Holy of Holies was a light place because the glory of God was in it.

After the Israelites left Mount Sinai they came to a place near Canaan and they sent twelve men to see what like it was. When they had come into it they saw a great vine and so they plucked a bunch of grapes and one man could not carry it so they took a long staff and tied the grapes to it and Caleb and Joshua carried it and the rest carried figs and pomegranates. Then when they came to the Israelites they asked what kind of place it was and they said that the cities had strong gates and walls and that the people were giants and they were just like grasshoppers beside them. Then the Israelites said no, they would never conquer them. Then Caleb and Joshua struck up and said yes they would for God would help them for the people in Canaan only worshipped images. But the people did not believe Caleb and Joshua and sat up all night moaning and crying. Then God was angry and said they would never come into Canaan but were to wander forty years in the wilderness, but their children when they grew up were to go

into Canaan and Caleb and Joshua were to go. They travelled away from that place back into the wilderness, then they murmured and said to Moses "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Here we have neither water nor food." Then Moses prayed to God and God told him to take his rod and speak to the rock. Then Moses went away and took his rod and Aaron came with Moses and they said, "Here now ye rebels must we bring you water out of this rock," and Moses struck the rock with his rod and water came flowing forth and God said to Moses and Aaron that they should not go into Canaan but should die and Moses prayed to God and asked him if he might go into it and God told him not to pray any more because he should not go into it but God said to Moses that he should not die so soon as Aaron.

Then when they came to a place in the wilderness there was a great lot of serpents and their mouths burned like fire and God sent them among them when they murmured and they bit them and it made them very ill and they said to Moses to pray to God that he might take away the serpents from them. Then God told Moses to take some brass and soften it in the fire and to cut it into the shape of one of the serpents and to put it upon a pole and to hold up the pole and the Israelites who looked at the serpent would get better. That should put us in mind of Jesus, because the old serpent the Devil bit us, that means made us naughty and when we look at Jesus that makes us better—not to look, at Jesus with our eyes but to look with praying. Then God took away the serpents and when

the Israelites looked at the brazen serpent they were quite well.

Then God said to Moses that he would have to die and God sent Moses alone up to a high hill called Nebo where he could see the whole land of Canaan and God buried him in a valley in the land of Moab and nobody knows where Moses was buried to this day. And there was great weeping in all Israel for Moses.

R. L. Stevenson

Facsimile of R. L. S.'s Early Signature.

The End.

