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ARTICLE VI.

OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM TO-DAY.

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THE article in the *Expositor* for December, 1913, by Professor Adam C. Welch, on "The Present Position of Old Testament Criticism," will have been read with keen interest by students of the Old Testament. It is a satisfaction to realize that Dr. Welch is fully alive to the results of recent works directed against the Wellhausen school. Certainly nothing could be more encouraging to conservative scholarship than the admissions he makes. He opens by saying that

> "men are not merely questioning some of the results arrived at, but revising certain of the canons set up. . . the criticism is no longer confined to insistence on the dangerous tendencies of the hypothesis or on the disturbing character of its results; it has taken for its arms the weapons used by the school in its days of unquestioned triumph — the weapons of scientific accuracy and loyalty to facts" (p. 518).

But, in spite of these frank words, Dr. Welch considers it would be unwise to conclude that the Wellhausen hypothesis is exploded and that we can return to earlier positions. He believes the theory in general is too firmly based on facts to be lightly set aside, and he, therefore, advises those who consider the Wellhausen position is overturned to note two things: (1) that some of the strongest assailants are far more radical than Wellhausen himself in relation to the traditional position; (2) that even though the Wellhausen theory is being questioned at present, the majority "quietly accept its well-assured results."

As to the first of these contentions, it may be frankly admitted that Eerdmans' view is in many respects far more radical than Wellhausen's; but the point to be remembered is that Eerdmans has confessedly attacked a position which was thought to be impregnable, and has compelled the reopening of what was thought to be closed years ago. It really does not matter, for the moment, that Eerdmans' view is untenable to conservatives; it suffices to point out his attack on the "assured results" of Wellhausen. As to this Eerdmans says:—

"Personally I am convinced that critics are on the wrong track, and that we shall never be able to explain the composite character of the Hexateuch if we do not do away with the Jehovistic, Elohistic and priestly works of the numerous younger Jehovistic, Elohistic and priestly writers" (Expositor, Seventh Series, vol. viii. p. 23).

As to Dr. Welch's second statement, one of the "well-assured results" is said to be that Deuteronomy is not Mosaic in its present form, in the sense of dating from the Exodus, and that this was recognized long ago in the Robertson Smith controversy as "the crux of the position." Hence to put Deuteronomy late is to recognize that the law in its present form comes after and not before the earliest written prophets; and, according to Dr. Welch, this

"broad change in the whole method of approach to the study of the Old Testament is not seriously questioned in the many criticisms which are being urged to-day" (p. 519).

Now before giving attention to this question of Deuteronomy, which admittedly is "the crux of the position," it will be worth while to observe the further admissions made by Dr. Welch in regard to the Wellhausen school:—

"But behind the reconstruction and governing all the interpretation of the facts were certain opinions as to the methods of divine revelation and as to evolution. These views deeply and subtly influenced the theory, and helped towards its success" (p. 519).

". . . gradually the facts have increased, their force is felt more and more, as men free themselves from the power of prejudice, and it is becoming clearer that the theory must be widened to meet the new position" (p. 520).

The discovery of the code of Hammurapi is said to urge one matter of fundamental importance:—

"The Wellhausen hypothesis thrust all law, civil and ceremonial, much too late, because it posited for the beginning of Israel's settled life in Canaan a community which had no knowledge of or need for law. But we have come to see that the men came to their land with a national character already formed and a national life already shaped" (p. 523).

The result of this is said to be twofold: First, it is important to remember that the Hebrew religion is not due to Canaanitish and Babylonian influences.

"That attitude towards the most self-consistent and most enduring national life the world has ever seen was always more than a little unsatisfactory" (p. 523).

On the other hand, new weight has to be given to the traditions of Israel itself, and we have to listen to what Israel has to say about its own origins.

" . . . Hence it is no exaggeration to say that the old phrase, Moses and the Prophets, is coming back again, though with very different views as to what is meant both by Moses and by the prophets" (p. 524).

Dr. Welch then explains how the Wellhausen theory came to be so successful and so universally accepted.

". . . The Wellhausen theory was framed under the influence of certain dominant conceptions as to the origin and growth of religion which were then current. In part it owed its success to the simple fact, that it thus fell in with the Zeitgeist. Evolution was in the air, and the theory seemed to apply evolution to the development of the Hebrew religion. But evolution with laws borrowed from the physical order is apt to blunder badly when it is applied to religion at all, and especially to blunder when it is applied to the Hebrew religion which gives so large a space to prophecy" (p. 524).

Without going unduly into details, it is impossible to avoid noticing the following significant statements made by Dr. Welch in regard to the Wellhausen attitude to the Old Testament. [The italics are mine.]

". . . The theory submitted the prophets to a scheme of evolution which had not been patient enough to learn the laws of development of religion from religion itself. As a result, certain elements in their teaching were *ignored*, other elements were *ruled out*" (p. 525).

". . . The theory could find no room in its view of how religion develops for such a factor, and so, sometimes with an *uneasy conscience*, that factor in the Hebrew faith was *ignored*" (p. 525).

". . . When the prophets declared, as they do with one voice, that they said these things in virtue of a deeper knowledge of God and His will, their testimony was *ignored*. They were either deceiving themselves or saying things which they *really did not quite mean*" (p. 526).

". . . There were passages in the prophets in which these spoke of the day of the Lord as implying an intervention direct and immediate to set up a new order in the world which was under their God's power. These also were *inconvenient to the theory*. . . . All such sayings which implied a relation between God and a world *must be late*. But the passages also offended because men had formed the prophets in their own likeness. Believing themselves in a long slow process, at the end of which God should bring His new order, they believed that the prophets must have held the same thing. That God should intervene directly meant a break in the chain of evolution; . . .

"Hence the passages which implied a different view were *watered down or explained away*. . . . So there came to be common a violent and often *painfully arbitrary treatment* of the text of the prophets. They were cut to pieces and assigned to many dates" (pp. 526–527).

In view of these truly remarkable admissions, we are not surprised at what Dr. Welch adds:—

"I think it is no exaggeration to say that the result has been to cast very *strong suspicion, in calmer minds, on the worth of the whole critical movement*" (p. 527).

Further, we are told that

"through the later work of the Wellhausen school of criticism the distinctive character of the Hebrew religion seemed to be in danger of disappearing altogether" (p. 528).

Now if all this can be said of the Wellhausen school, can we be surprised if many have found it difficult to feel confidence in it? Nor can we wonder at the inability to believe, as Dr. Welch evidently still does, that

"The scheme in its broad features still holds the field, and even many of its detailed results are proved" (p. 529).

A critical position which admittedly ruled out certain elements, ignored certain factors "sometimes with an uneasy conscience," regarded certain passages as "inconvenient to the theory," and "watered down or explained away" still others, surely cannot be regarded as truly scientific or even scholarly in the proper sense of that word.

In the light of all these admissions we proceed to consider the subject of Deuteronomy; and it is here that conservative scholarship willingly joins issue with the Wellhausen school, believing that this is indeed "the crux of the position," and also feeling confident that Deuteronomy is substantially Mosaic in the sense of dating from the age of the Exodus. Would it not be possible to concentrate on this point and to confine ourselves to a discussion of it? I believe that all conservative scholars would be ready to admit that if Deuteronomy is proved to be late the entire Wellhausen position may be regarded as settled; while if Deuteronomy is Mosaic the Wellhausen theory necessarily falls to the ground. Let us then state the simple but all-important issue. The considerations to which attention will be called are strictly general in character, and do not attempt to deal with the detailed technicalities which are often discussed in connection with this subject. It does not seem to be at all necessary to go beyond the discus-

sion of broad outlines, because the decision will really turn on these rather than on a multitude of details. In justification of our limiting attention in this way, the well-known words of the late Professor Robertson Smith may be quoted:—

"The questions with which criticism deals are within the scope of any one who reads the English Bible carefully and is able to think clearly and without prejudice about its contents" (Preface to Wellhausen's Prolegomena, p. vii).

The contentions now adduced represent a summary of the arguments in favor of the early date of Deuteronomy as given in several works referred to or quoted below.

First of all, reference may be made to a series of articles by Professor G. L. Robinson, of Chicago, which appeared in the *Expositor* several years ago (Fifth Series, vols. viii. and ix.). These are his reasons for concluding that Deuteronomy was composed early:—

1. Because it was primarily intended to be a code of conquest for Israel. It is a military law book, not a single statute which was intended for the desert.

2. Because the book is not only hortatory and prophetic, but peculiarly so. The great outstanding characteristic of Deuteronomy is its parenetic element.

3. The style is a witness to its early origin. The people are repeatedly reminded that they are not yet come into the rest which the Lord is about to give them.

4. The language also favors an early date.

5. The hypothesis of an early origin allows for the book's obvious unity. No other book, unless it be Ezekiel, bears such unmistakable signs in unity, aim, language, and thought.

6. The teaching is more directly appropriate to an early date, the great central thought being the unique relation which Jehovah as a unique God sustains to Israel as a unique people.

It is at this point that conservative scholarship takes issue with critical, the reason being that it is impossible to expect the dictum that "law is the product of prophecy," or, more concretely, to use Dr. Driver's words, that "the author of Deuteronomy is the spiritual heir of Hosea." Dr. Welch, as quoted above, has pointed out how directly and definitely the Wellhausen theory was framed under the influence of the theory of evolution.

7. The book itself bears explicit witness to the early origin of its Hebrew contents (see chap. xxxi. 24–26). On the assumption that Moses did not write the Deuteronomic law, is it possible to account for the proper inspiration of these words? And if the author deliberately made an inaccurate statement, what is the precise value of the words?

Additional considerations, drawn in substance from Orr's "Problem of the Old Testament," Whitelaw's "Old Testament Critics," Griffiths' "Problem of Deuteronomy," and other works, are the following:—

1. There is nothing in the account of 2 Kings xxii. and xxiii. to indicate that those who discovered the book considered it was in any sense new or recent. On the contrary, it was regarded as by Moses.

2. If the teaching of Deuteronomy was not known before the time of Josiah in regard to centralization of worship, the three feasts, and the prohibition of idolatry, the question arises why Jeroboam set up the calves; why Solomon dedicated the temple on the seventh month (the month of the Feast of Tabernacles); why Hezekiah broke down the high places if they were not then illegal; and why Elkanah and Hannah went up to Shiloh? If the narrative is not trustworthy in these respects, why should we regard it as accurate about Josiah?

3. There is so much in the book that is inappropriate to the time of Josiah, including the extermination of the Canaanites; the prospective election of the king; the references to Edom, Moab, and Egypt, and the instructions about Ebal and Gerizim. All these would be perfectly appropriate to the time of the later days of Moses, but absolutely incongruous in the time of Josiah (Vos, Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes, pp. 186 ff., 197 ff.).

4. Why should the book be ascribed to Moses unless this were actually the case? If a book invented in the time of Manasseh could be accepted by the people as from Moses, it surely implies that they possessed books which would enable them to accept and associate Deuteronomy with their great Lawgiver. Would this be true if the Book of the Covenant (Ex. xx.–xxiii.) were all? And why, too, should they ascribe this to Moses if its practice, as admitted by the Critical school, is against that of the Book of the Covenant?

5. The outlook of the book is totally different from that of 2 Kings xxii. The Critical school asserts that the great object of the book was the centralization of the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem; whereas this was not so much the question in the time of Josiah (it is not alluded to in Kings) as the worship of false gods, which in Deuteronomy is treated of only as something that might happen in the future. As Sir William Muir says, Deuteronomy is its own witness, and it has "the clear and vivid touch and outline of reality which mark contemporaneous history."

6. There can be no doubt that if we accept the clear and constant testimony of the book, Moses is responsible both for its substance and form. Bissell remarks that it would surprise one unacquainted with the subject to know how large a portion of it is put directly into the mouth of Moses and

is represented as spoken by him. "By actual enumeration of verses it makes fifteen-sixteenths of the whole matter. Out of nearly a thousand verses there are but sixty that are not in the form of direct address; that is to say, that do not purport to be the word for word utterance of Moses himself" (The Pentateuch, its Origin and Structure, p. 259). The name of Moses is found thirty-seven times, and usually with the purpose of connecting him with its subject matter, and almost everything is associated with such phrases as "Moses spoke," "Moses commanded," "The Lord said to Moses." Surely a careful consideration of the evidence on this point compels the acceptance of the following words of Bissell:—

"It is a remarkable circumstance and one which cannot be overlooked or evaded in any worthy discussion of the genuineness of Deuteronomy. If the person to whom we are indebted for the book as we now have it, whoever he may have been, had deliberately set out to place beyond all dispute the question of Mosaic responsibility for its contents, it would be hard to say how he could have stated it more carefully or wisely" (p. 260).

7. With regard to the laws which are found in Deuteronomy alone, if the book was prepared by the reforming party in the days of Josiah, the laws peculiar to it should be reformatory in character, and have a distinct reference to the circumstances of those to whom the book was addressed. But it cannot be fairly argued that there is anything distinctively reformatory associated with many of these laws, and nothing to connect any of them specifically with the reformation under Josiah. No suitable occasion can be found in the historical circumstances in the latter half of the seventh century. On the contrary, many of the laws bear the proof of a much earlier date. Can any one imagine a book, intended to quicken the conscience and to promote reformation, having its pages filled with details about bird-nesting and other matters,

with no bearing on the serious condition of affairs then existent (see Princeton Theological Review, vol. i. pp. 455 f.)?

8. How is it that the place which was to be the central sanctuary of Jehovah is not once mentioned in this book? There is not the slightest intimation that the central sanctuary is to be in a great city. The only references are to "the place which the Lord thy God shall choose," and similar general statements. But from the standpoint of the Critical school the omission of any hint that Jerusalem was to be the place is almost inexplicable. Wellhausen seems to have been impressed by this absence of the name, for he writes, "How modest, one might almost say how awkwardly bashful, is the Deuteronomic reference to the future place which Jehovah is to choose" (Prolegomena, p. 37). Mark this curious phrase, "awkwardly bashful." Yet there is no such "bashfulness" about First and Second Kings (of contemporary date on the critical view), where Jerusalem is mentioned several times. What can be the explanation of this absence of the name of Jerusalem from Deuteronomy, and from the Pentateuch in general? Surely it is that at the time Deuteronomy was written Jerusalem had not become the place of the central sanctuary.

9. In view of the general belief that the date of Deuteronomy is one of the established results of criticism, it is curious that Dr. Kennett, of Cambridge, a few years ago, argued in favor of making it exilic, and proposed to place it about B.C. 520. Dr. Redpath was able to show that, while Dr. Kennett effectually disposed of many of the arguments in favor of the ordinary critical date, he at the same time brought forward such inconclusive arguments in favor of his own hypothesis, that the implication is almost inevitable that the traditional date is after all correct (Churchman, Feb. 1907). This is

only now used to illustrate the obvious impossibility of stopping short with the time of Josiah, if once we give up the Mosaic date.

10. Several years ago, a well-known missionary in Asia Minor, Dr. G. E. White, wrote an article, "Deuteronomy in Eastern Light" (Churchman, Nov. 1909), in which he used his own experience of the East to show that Deuteronomy existed substantially in its present form earlier than is allowed by the Critical school. Dr. White said that if Orientalism be allowed its place in the interpretation of the Old Testament along with literary criticism and archæology, the writer of Deuteronomy will be rehabilitated as one who could comprehend and state the facts. Dr. White's conclusion is that the Critical view cannot be reconciled with that presented in the book itself, and he believes that the book will be ultimately established as trustworthy, and its view of its own origin regarded as true.

These are some of the outstanding arguments in favor of the early date of Deuteronomy, and until they are met and vanquished the conservative view will continue to be regarded as much more natural, and far truer to the Biblical view, than the Critical theory. There can be no doubt of the distinct issue between Criticism and the Biblical theory of Deuteronomy, and if one is true the other must be false. Although objection is often raised to argument put in the form of a dilemma, yet it is impossible to doubt the essential truth of the statement made by the late Dr. F. Watson, that if Deuteronomy does not contain a considerable Mosaic element, it can be nothing else than a pious fraud, while on the other hand if the bulk is Mosaic, the arguments which are said to prove its late date are to a considerable extent invalid (Thinker, vol. vi. p. 401).