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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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APRIL, 1892.

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ART. I.—OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

No. II.—WELLHAUSEN.

IT is of course, impossible to give anything like a detailed account of Wellhausen's "History of Israel" within the limits to which this paper must be confined. But it may be possible within a short compass to supply a sufficient number of instances of his method to enable those who read to judge for themselves what its value is likely to be to the reverent and honest student of the Old Testament. He commences with an interesting piece of autobiography. He was, he tells us, a diligent student of the historical books, but he never could feel it to be anything else than a mistake to suppose that the Mosaic Law was presupposed throughout those books. He read Knobel's "Commentaries" and Ewald's "History of Israel" without finding any help. It was not until he fell in with the theories of Karl Heinrich Graf that light broke in upon him, and he was at once ready to acknowledge "the possibility of understanding Hebrew antiquity without the book of the Torah." From this point we enter upon that realm of conjecture founded on fancy, which is so marked a characteristic of the new criticism. He commences with a bold assumption, in direct contradiction to the statements in the histories with which he deals. He declares that "the period of the Judges presents itself as a confused chaos, out of which order and coherence are gradually evolved under the pressure of external circumstances, but perfectly naturally and without the faintest reminiscence of a sacred unifying constitution that had formerly existed" (p. 5). It is true that

the book of Judges itself says exactly the opposite. It tells us how the "sacred unifying constitution" *had* once existed, and it repeatedly explains the chaotic condition of Israel in later years as being the direct result of neglect of that constitution. But this matters little to a German commentator. As may be imagined from the last paper, he is prepared to make short work of any facts which may conflict with theory. All these allusions to a law previously given are post-exilic additions. As Knobel coolly and without the slightest attempt at proof assigns all references to the "book of the Law" placed in Joshua's hands to the Deuteronomist in the time of Josiah, so all portions of Judges which refer to the Law and Israel's disobedience to it, are declared by Wellhausen to be later additions. This, says Wellhausen, with delicious *sans froid*, "is admitted" (p. 231). By whom and why so admitted, we are not told. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt of the fact. These allusions to the Law of Moses are "merely a uniform in which" the original tradition "is clothed." We are, moreover, informed that "it is usual to call this later version Deuteronomistic." But not one word of evidence is adduced in support of a statement so startling to an ordinary student of history, except that we do not find any evidence of a "hierocracy." But no one ever said that there *was* any evidence of a "hierocracy." The government of Israel, as described in the historical books, was an oligarchy tempered by recourse to the oracle of God. The priesthood, according to the whole Old Testament, had no more to do with the details of government than the priestesses of the oracle at Delphi. And if, as Wellhausen remarks, the kings put up and set down priests at their pleasure, there are two points to be remembered. They did not venture out of the Aaronic line, and their claim to depose High Priests may have been as much an unjust interference in ecclesiastical matters as many earnest Churchmen believe the appointment of Bishops by the Prime Minister to be, and as the action of the Roman government in Palestine in regard to the High Priests undoubtedly was.

It is a pity this ingenious, if somewhat high-handed, mode of treating history has never occurred to polemical historians. Thus it would have been extremely convenient for the advocates of Divine right in the seventeenth century if they could have declared all allusions to the Witenagemot in Anglo-Saxon times to be "merely a uniform" in which later historians, unfavourable to despotic power, had "clothed" the history of those early times, in which it was quite impossible, in the nature of things, that anything approaching to freedom could possibly have existed. Thus, too, Magna Charta, and the prolonged and ultimately successful struggle to have it enforced,

might have been proved to be "a uniform" in which late Liberal thought had "clothed" the days in which kings had unlimited power. A continued chain of acts of arbitrary authority might be brought forward as inconsistent with any doctrine of the liberty of the subject in those primitive days. And the fact that the Yorkist contention in favour of a legal in preference to a Parliamentary title to the Crown was ultimately admitted and acted upon for centuries, might be adduced as irrefragable evidence that England "knew nothing" of a Parliamentary title to the throne until the disastrous Revolution of 1688. This mode of writing—or making—history would be a boon to thick and thin partisans the value of which it would not be easy to exaggerate. It is due to our misfortune in being inhabitants of our "duller England" that it has never occurred to us until just lately.

We next come to the way in which Hupfeld's theory of a first and second Elohist and a Jehovist is dealt with. We may learn from this how critics of the same school are treated whenever their opinions happen to be inconvenient. Hupfeld's view "cannot," we are told, "be maintained" (p. 7). But the sole ground of this assertion is another, to the effect that the Jehovist and so-called Elohist are "most closely akin" to one another, and that "his document has come down to us, as Nöldeke was the first to perceive" (we are not told how, and must turn to Nöldeke for the demonstration), "only in extracts embodied in the Jehovist narrative." In other words, there is no such well-marked distinction between the Jehovist and the second Elohist, as would alone justify the critic in assuming his existence. We are not concerned to dispute Wellhausen's further assertion that the Jehovistic document is a "complex product." Every history is; but if anyone were to attempt to resolve any history whatever into its sources without the aid of the notes which every careful historian adds, the result would be a crop of ludicrous blunders. If this is denied, let the experiment be tried, if it be possible. Let any historical critic be shut up, say, with Mr. Motley's "History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic," after all the notes have been carefully removed, and let him tell us to what sources the facts related are to be ascribed, which to Hoofd, which to Meteren, which to Bor, which to Strada, and so on, and then we shall see how much reliance is to be placed on the analytic criticism. Sometimes, no doubt, there would be a happy guess. Strada, for instance, would be a probable authority for any incidents specially concerning Spain. But such an attempt would be certain, in the main, to be a dismal failure. One result, on the methods of German critics, would frequently happen. A fact which is related by half a dozen

writers, would be unhesitatingly ascribed to one.<sup>1</sup> And incidents bearing hardly on Spanish tyranny and unscrupulousness would on those principles be assigned to Netherland sources, whereas, as a matter of fact, a historian of Mr. Motley's stamp distinctly declines to rely on those sources alone on any point where corroboration is desirable. Professor Driver, it is true, disposes of the former objection by representing the Hebrew historians as mere compilers. But if so, what becomes of Wellhausen's assertion (p. 8) that all the books as they stand, are "complex products," with which "hybrid or posthumous elements" are combined?

Next we are told (p. 9) that the "Priestly Code" contains "many serious inconsistencies with what we know," and that "it is recognised that Deuteronomy was composed in the age in which it was discovered," that is, "in all circles where appreciation of scientific results can be looked for at all." This quiet assumption that all "science" is confined to the advocates of unlimited speculation is a peculiar characteristic of the new criticism, and accounts to a very great extent for its spread. People do not like to be described, as Ewald describes those who cling to the traditional view, as "outside all science." But we shall never settle the question until a race of scholars shall appear to whom it is a matter of absolute indifference whether they are regarded as "scientific" or not, and who will analyse and dissect the assertions of Wellhausen and Kuenen and their disciples as mercilessly as if they had the misfortune to be critics of the orthodox type.

The next assertion we may notice (though it should be remembered that every page teems with similar bold and unproved assertions) is that because the doctrine of local unity of worship is opposed in Deuteronomy to "the things that we do here this day," it must be regarded as polemical, and is "rightly therefore assigned by historical criticism to the period of the attacks made on the Bamoth by the reforming party at Jerusalem" (p. 33). Here our author has made a slight slip. A "reforming" party is usually supposed to be striving to bring back things to the former and better usage. But he assumes that there was *no* prohibition of the high places antecedent to Deuteronomy. It is clear that the

<sup>1</sup> We shall see further on (p. 344) that if an ancient historian refers to a variety of authorities, and he happens not to be in favour with the critics, he is charged (or someone is charged) with having falsified his sources, and referred to a number of documents which are in reality the work of one writer. So that when several authors are referred to, they are not several, but the same. When a book comes down to us as written by one hand, it is analyzed into six or seven different "sources." One might as well attempt to bind Proteus as to enter into controversy with critics such as these.

language used in Deut. xii. is at least as reconcilable with the traditional view as with that which is suggested instead of it. This passage, therefore, must take its place among the dogmas of the new criticism, which are to be imposed by authority on the votaries of the new faith. Our next instance shall be the way in which Wellhausen deals with the story of the altar Ed in Josh. xxii. He passes over it in most gingerly fashion, for it is in truth rather an awkward fact to deal with on his theory that the command to offer sacrifice at one place only is first given in Deuteronomy and is thence assumed in the Priestly Code. If this theory be correct, then the whole account in Josh. xxii. is an invention. No words can do justice to the ingenious manner in which Wellhausen (p. 38) contrives delicately to insinuate that this is the case without attempting to deal with the narrative. A fair and honest effort to grapple with the details in this chapter on the part of the critics is, and is likely to remain, a *desideratum*.

In p. 46 Wellhausen, in dealing with an argument of Nöldeke's, eminently characteristic of the new criticism, but asserting that "a strong tendency towards unity of worship *must* have arisen as soon as Solomon's temple was built," is actually compelled by the necessities of his position to deviate into common-sense. "What *must* have happened," he says, "is of less consequence to know than what actually took place." Precisely so. We want to know, not what German or other critics think "must" or ought to have been the case, but what our historical authorities tell us to be such. If Wellhausen's principle in this passage be borne in mind throughout the study of his book, it will be an excellent antidote to his own conclusions. He tells us, possibly because it "must have" been so, that "it was Amos, Hosea and Isaiah who first *introduced* the movement against the old popular worship of the high places" (p. 47); and they were led to this, not by any abstract preference for the temple at Jerusalem, but by "ethical motives" which may very easily be discerned. But these prophets distinctly charge those whom they rebuke with a breach of a Divine law. It is this spirit of disobedience to God's enactments which points the reproaches in their pages. And it is in strict keeping with this that we find worship at the high places spoken of as unlawful throughout the whole of the books of the Kings, from the time when the temple was dedicated. If we are to judge of "what actually took place" on historical evidence, instead of on the history as conjecturally reconstructed by the critics, we have no alternative but to reject this statement of Wellhausen's, which has no basis of historical fact to support it. If the prophets sternly, nay, even fiercely, accuse Israel and

Judah of having broken the Divine law, there must have been a Divine law already in existence for them to break. But we are practically told that they had no such law, until the book of Deuteronomy was written, hid in the temple, and then "found" and declared to be the original law given by Moses. If any law, we are further told, existed before this period, it was not committed to writing, and was known to few beside the priests. If so, what a mockery were the rebukes of the earlier prophets! What hypocrisy was their assumed sternness, unless we are to subject their contents to a revision as thorough as that of the Pentateuch, and assign all allusions to the broken law to a date at least posterior to that assigned to Deuteronomy.

We proceed to another curious piece of argument. We are told that "we expect to find" the altar of incense mentioned in Exod. xxv.-xxix., whereas it is not actually mentioned until chap. xxx. There, we are further informed, it is an "appendix." Why, asks Wellhausen, is it not mentioned where, in his opinion, it ought to be mentioned? The answer is clear. The reason why the author of chaps. xxv.-xxix. does not mention it is because "he does not know of it. There is no other possibility, for he cannot have forgotten it." In other words, if an author does not marshal his facts in exactly the order a German critic considers he ought to have mentioned them, the critic aforesaid is entitled, not merely to suspect, but to assume, that not one, but two authors have been at work. It is not too much to say that on all ordinary principles of criticism this assertion is simply astounding. So astounding, that we may be pardoned for repeating this remarkable syllogism in another form. The mention of the altar of incense is not found in chaps. xxv.-xxix. of the book of Exodus. But Wellhausen thinks that this was the proper place for it. It is found in the very next chapter. But as it does not come in where, in Wellhausen's opinion, it should come in, we are to regard this as indubitable evidence that chap. xxx. is by a later hand. Is this criticism? or is it not, rather, to use the words of our great dramatist, "very midsummer madness"? There are few books in the present day, it is to be feared, which are so unexceptionable in their logical arrangement as to escape being held, on Wellhausen's principles, to display indubitable traces of composite authorship. Then we are told (p. 72) that eating before Jehovah "nowhere occurs" in the Priestly Code, "or, at all events, is no act of Divine worship." The account of the peace-offerings in Levit. vii. does not seem to bear out this statement. And when Deut. xxi. 1-9 is cited to show the vast difference between the Deuteronomist and the Priestly Code, one may, perhaps, be permitted to express a

little surprise—if, indeed, one has a right to be surprised at anything which may be said on this subject. The occasion in Deut. xxi. 1-9 is as different as possible from those contemplated in the Priestly Code, nor is it at all singular that it should have a ritual of its own. But when you have a case to make out, any and every instance of diversity of ritual must be pressed into the service, even though, as Sir Lucius O'Trigger puts it, "one would think it was quite out of hearing."

Again, in 1 Sam. vi. 15 we read of the Levites taking part in the proceedings relating to the return of the ark from the Philistines. But as this contradicts Wellhausen's theory that there is "no individual whose profession it is to take charge of the cultus" (p. 127), it must be got rid of at all hazards. It is a "gloss." And besides, does it not contradict the previous verse? The cart had already been offered for sacrifice, and the Levites proceed to "lift the ark from the now no longer existing cart" (yet Wellhausen admits that the verb relating to the action of the Levites is "in the pluperfect tense"!), "and set it upon the stone where the sacrifice is already burning—of course only in order to fulfil the law, the demands of which have been completely ignored in the original narrative." We might ask where the sacrifice is said to have been offered *on* the stone? But we confine ourselves to the repetition of the observation we have already made, that there is no historical event ever reported to have happened which could not be disproved by such a method as this. First of all, the reference to the Levites is arbitrarily asserted to be a "gloss." And then it is triumphantly asserted that "in the original narrative" not a word is said about the "demands of the law."

But Wellhausen's climax is reached in dealing with Chronicles. It is sufficiently obvious that the aim of the author of the books of Chronicles, writing as he does after the return from the captivity,<sup>1</sup> when the fortunes of the Jews are at their lowest ebb, is to encourage the Jews by dilating upon the ancient glories of the race, and especially by enlarging on the grandeur and dignity of that law through neglect of which the Jews had fallen so low. This attempt to glorify what, according to Wellhausen, had no existence in the best days of Jewish history, requires summary treatment. And summary treatment of a condign character, to do Wellhausen justice, is promptly meted out. The offender is called up for judgment to receive rather more than "forty stripes save one" from the pedagogue. First of all, the "cunning and treachery and battle and murder" of David, we are told, are disgracefully

<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen gives the date as 300 years after the Captivity. As usual he deigns to offer no proof of his assertion.



passed over, as if there were any duty incumbent upon the historian of dwelling on the one shameful fall of a man otherwise exceptionally distinguished for his greatness and his goodness. Then the author of Chronicles seems to "refresh himself with a little variety," but he rapidly descends to "rude and mechanical" passages "torn from" their connection. Then we come to "startling instances" of the "statistical phantasy of the Jews which revels in vast sums of money on paper, in artificial marshallings of names and numbers<sup>1</sup> in enumeration of subjects without predicates which simply stand on parade, and neither signify nor do anything." We are bid to try to read chapters "the monotony of which is," however, "broken" occasionally by "unctuous phrases." It is unfortunate, perhaps, for the books of Chronicles, that they were not written to please a German critic in the nineteenth century. They were written in the spirit of their own age, in which things may now be regarded as uninteresting were not so regarded. It is a question whether the books of Chronicles would have been so roughly handled if they had not had the misfortune to contradict so flatly the doctrines which Wellhausen and his school are so anxious to disseminate.

Wellhausen has another fling at Chronicles because it does not dwell on the inglorious facts which sullied the conclusion of Solomon's reign. After this he becomes quite calm, if perhaps a little patronizing. The "legendary anachronisms and exaggerations beside" are indulgently dismissed as "harmless." He even admits (p. 223) that the author may have produced his picture from "documents that lay before him." But then so much the worse for the documents. Their contents do not please Wellhausen, and therefore their historical credibility is called in question. The various works, seventeen in number, cited in Chronicles, have been "shown by Bertheau and others" to be one book under different names. A "*propheta eponymus*" has been found for each section. How this can be proved, as Hooker would have said, "doth not immediately appear." We are not allowed even a sketch of Bertheau's conclusive arguments. If we want to know what they are, we must resort to Bertheau for them. It is a little hard upon us, in matters of such importance, to be compelled to run the gauntlet of baseless assumptions and unproved assertions in this way. If the distinct statements of our historic authorities are to be thus con-

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<sup>1</sup> We might ask whether Wellhausen has by any chance ever heard of similar and yet more uninteresting lists on the Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian monuments? A little more familiarity than his writings display with the facts of contemporary history would entitle him to more respect as a historical critic.

temptuously set aside, it would be a little more respectful to their readers if the critics would condescend to tell them why, instead of telling them that someone else had "shown" that it was the case. But if a plausible case can be made out, that is quite enough for our author. Chronicles conflicts with his theory, and therefore is to be discredited. Bertheau has endeavoured to disparage the authorities which the author of the books of Chronicles tells us he has consulted. What needs more? When the critic speaks, there is no appeal. One book must, when he pleases, be resolved into six or seven sources, or seventeen sources must at his bidding be fused into one.

It is not intended to deny that Wellhausen states well and ably the discrepancies between Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code, and that he handles with much ingenuity and keenness the argument from the silence of the earlier narratives in regard to the observance of the Mosaic Law. But as this silence involves the observance of the Sabbath, and as such observance forms part of that "original form" of the Ten Commandments, which are admitted on all hands to have been given by Moses, his arguments can hardly be regarded as decisive. But in the few illustrations which have here been given of the scope and tendency of his book no injustice has been done to him. Occasionally, as has been said, one meets with solid argument and a fair and even striking statement of difficulties. But these are by no means the staple of his matter; the book literally bristles with unproved assertions, and this on a question in which, more than any other, it is impossible that assertion can be taken by earnest-minded men in the place of proof. The matter, however, may safely be left to the judgment of the public at large.

If any man of ordinary judgment and capacity is disposed—and many such men are at present so disposed—to accept the new criticism on the ground of the "general agreement of scholars," we should recommend him, before doing so, to study carefully the writings of Wellhausen. He will then be able to appreciate the methods by which this agreement is reached, and to rate them at their proper value. For the sake of those who have not time for this, we have given some specimens of his mode of dealing with the sacred record. They are, as has been said, a fair and honest sample of the whole. Why so strange combination of submissiveness to authority and devotion to fashion should have laid hold of so many of our leading Hebraists it is impossible to say. But the question is one for sensible men to decide. It does not rest with the devotees to a theory. And if sensible and unprejudiced Englishmen shall be found, after examination, to accept the dicta of a critic like Wellhausen, it will be one of the most remarkable events in a century of surprises.

J. J. LIAS.