

ARTICLE VII.

THE HISTORY OF THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL AND
ITS NEWER REPRESENTATION.¹

BY EDUARD FRIEDRICH KÖNIG, M.D., BONN, GERMANY.

1. IT is an open secret that the newer interpreters of the history of the religion of Israel who join the Wellhausen side base their views essentially upon the work of Wilhelm Vatke. The chief representative of this school says so himself; for he says at the end of the preface of his "*Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*" (2d ed., p. 14): "My conclusions are very nearly like those of Vatke, of whom I confess to have learned the most and best." With this he refers to Vatke's first main work, called "*Biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt.*" But this work was written by Vatke on the basis of Hegel's philosophy. This he admits just as readily as did his friend David Friedrich Strauss, who issued his "*Leben Jesu*" in the same year. Vatke even emphasizes his Hegelian standpoint in not a few places. For instance, he writes on page 591: "The historical course of the religion of the Old Testament comes to light as the outcome of the whole movement. If the tradition of the Hebrews gave the real course of the history of this people and its religion, we should find ourselves face to face with an enigma to which we can find absolutely no analogy; we should have the culmination at the beginning."

There is, however, an unscientific exaggeration in these

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words; for, even if the historical tradition of the Israelites is taken, as it appears after critical research, it will by no means say that the culmination of the historical course was at the beginning. For this historical tradition also recognizes a development of the religious conceptions of Israel; for instance, in regard to the names of God and his attributes, and in regard to the legislation and the prophecies.

But should the historical tradition of Israel really show the culmination at the beginning, we would have to say, in the second place, that the historian ought to acknowledge this. For, refusing to do so, Vatke proved that he did not know the real method of historical research. He did not try to find the history in its sources, but to evolve it out of philosophical discussions. Like his teacher Hegel, Vatke conceived all history, especially the history of religion, under the point of view of constant evolution; and, according to this, his view had to rise from thesis to antithesis, and by suppression of these contraries to a new stage. So Vatke's view of the course of history was, by principle, evolutionary. Wellhausen, then, has learned "the most and the best" from a man who knew beforehand, according to his philosophical ideas, the rhythm of the course of history.

2. But perhaps this fundamental view inherited from Vatke, that all history, and especially the history of the religion of the Old Testament, showed the process of evolution, or inner development, out of a primitive germ, does not predominate any longer in the new works of the representatives of the Wellhausen school? This, however, is a vain hope, as we see when looking through these works with this object in view; for here we find, for instance, the following traces of evolutionary views.

Through the newer representations of Israel's history of

religion (as, for instance, in "Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments," by B. Stade, of which the first volume appeared in 1905) there runs, in the first place, like a red thread, the fundamental idea that a causal relation must have existed between the local surroundings of the Israelites and the growth of their political strength, on the one side, and the origin and development of their religion, on the other. For this cause these interpreters of the history of the religion of Israel make a pretended Beduin-ideal the father of the Old Testament religion, let the God of Israel "grow in the fight with the Canaanite gods,"¹ and make David, "also, a founder of religion," because, by the establishment of his kingdom, Jahve is said to have been made a god of the people instead of a primitive deity. Moreover, one finds in these representations a tendency to start from the "primitive" peoples, and their supposed extremely low ideas about God are taken as the standard of the original form of the true religion of Israel.² With Stade, the comparison of "specially primitive religions" serves to establish what were the religious thoughts of the patriarchs. Measured in this way, the patriarchs are supposed to have been the adherents of Fetichism and Demonology. Especially is fetichism attributed to the patriarchs by Wellhausen;³ and this statement is also defended by Kautzsch in his "Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments" (1911), which had already been published in

¹So Wellhausen in *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, vol. 1. pt. 4 (1906), p. 14.

²Proofs for this from Stade can be found in my *Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Religion kritisch dargestellt* (1912, bei Bertelsmann in Gütersloh), p. 25.

³Proofs for this from Stade, sect. 15, and others can be found in my *Geschichte der alttest. Religion*, p. 76.

1904 in England,¹ and therefore could be criticized in about seventy places in my volume.

3. But some might say, Though it cannot be disputed that Wellhausen's ideas in the representation of the history of the religion of Israel had started from Hegel's fundamental views, and have not been entirely severed from them, yet, for all this, the construction of the history as found in the works of the Wellhausen school need not have been influenced by this theory, and the representation of the course of Israel's history of religion which is found in the works of the Wellhausen school may, nevertheless, be perfectly correct. But is this really the case? To settle this question was the task which fell to the scientific students of the Old Testament, in opposition to these representations of Israel's history of religion, especially as they have been put before us since 1880, when Stade began to publish his "*Geschichte des Volkes Israel.*" Have now these representatives of the Old Testament researches changed their ground? By no means. The course of their contentions has, in its chief features, been as follows:

a. They first set out with the statement that the prophets of the eighth century had appeared as new creators, and had really produced the true Israelitish religion. So, then, the relation of these prophets, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and so on to Moses, was the chief question which has come up for examination over and over again since 1880. Hence in my preliminary publication "*Die Hauptprobleme der altisraelitischen Religionsgeschichte*" (1884); in the work of James Robertson, "*The Early Religion of Israel*" (1885, later edited in German by von Orelli); of Kittel in his "*Geschichte der Hebräer*" (1888 and 1892); of Oettli, in "*Der Kultus bei Amos und Hosea*" (1895); of Sellin, in "*Beiträge zur israel-*

¹ In Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, Extra Volume (1904), pp. 612-734.

itischen und jüdischen Religionsgeschichte," vol. i. (1896) pp. 34-39, etc.; of Giesebrecht, in "Die Geschichtlichkeit des Sinaibundes" (1901), — in all these works, it was confirmed over and over again that the prophets of the eighth century were, according to their own testimony, primarily only *reformers*, if one may express it in a single word. They had the message of bidding their contemporaries to turn back to the religion as founded in Israel's youth (Hos. xi. 1), and to protest against all moral and religious deviations in which smaller or larger circles in Israel had denied that old idea. That these prophets had, in the second place, to complete the law, and so to deepen it, to develop more fully and to spiritualize the prophecy, has not been overlooked in these historical researches.

In consequence of these demonstrations, constantly growing more complete, the representatives of the Wellhausen side began later to acknowledge the extravagances of earlier sayings about the position of the prophets of the eighth century in the Old Testament history of religion. For Stade owns in his "Alttestamentlichen Theologie" (vol. i., 1905), § 105, that there was "a grain of truth in the common [!] conception which made the prophets of the eighth century appeal to the works of Moses." Lastly, a scholar who had taken Wellhausen's side in an extreme way upon a capital point¹ (the Messianic prophecy) opposed the adherents of that side in a decided manner on behalf of the religio-historical position of Moses. This, P. Volz did in his book "Mose: Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung über die Ursprünge der israelitischen Religion" (1907). Therefore one may say that a first chapter in the newer discussion about the course of the history of Israel's religion was concluded in the year 1907, although

¹ P. Volz, *Die vorexilische Jahveprophetie und der Messias* (1897).

much had to be straightened out yet in relation to the position of the prophets of the eighth century in the Old Testament History of Religion.¹

b. When this fundamental question was decided in its essentials, historic research had to begin a new chapter. The question had to be decided, whether the beginning of the true religion of Israel did not reach also *back of the time of Moses*. Hence it had to be determined whether the *patriarchs* really possessed only the common Semitic religion, as is maintained by the representatives of the Wellhausen school. It had to be determined whether the patriarchs really stood only on the basis of Polydemonism, of animal worship, ancestor worship and fetichism, worshipping holy mountains, waters, trees and stones as the habitations of godlike beings; for fetichism is ascribed to the patriarchs not only by Stade and Marti, but also by Kautzsch. As, on this view, the patriarchs are placed on a level with other Semites and primitive peoples, it seems to be an unhistorical statement, since Abraham separated himself even from his parents precisely *because* of his religion. Hence it is necessary to examine the modern dogma, according to which no "patriarchal religion" could be reckoned as the true religion of Israel of the first grade. This was a second principal reason why I have now edited the already mentioned "Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Religion." In it I hope to have proved, by critical examination of all the newer statements about the religious conditions in the time of the patriarchs, that the Bible is absolutely correct in calling their religion the first degree of the true religion of Israel.

c. Alongside of this chief debate ran many others. For,

¹ Compare my *Geschichte*, etc., pp. 343-350, where everything has been criticized, even what was called new or unheard-of in Wellhausen's newest work about the prophets of the eighth century.

during the last twenty to thirty years, the whole construction of the history of Israel's religion as built up by the Wellhausen school has been examined in its basis and all its phases by many learned critics, and the voice of these¹ can be heard once more in my book. In these researches about the Wellhausen history of Israel's religion, answer has been given, for instance, to the following questions: Was the name of the God who revealed himself to Moses borrowed from the Midianites to whom Moses fled?² Was the Godhead announced by Moses "a local god"? Was this god looked upon as a god of thunderstorms, — a Vulcan who was governed by the consciousness of his might, and demanded to be worshiped by human sacrifice? Did the "desert religion" of the Mosaic Israel turn into a "rustic religion" after its immigration into Canaan? Was the religious perception of Israel "enriched" by the myths and legends of Babylon? Was the Ark in the holy of holies regarded as a representation of Jahve? Did the name of God, Jahve Sebaoth, which is introduced in 1 Sam. i. 3, mean the god of the "mythological powers" (lightning, rain), as the auxiliaries of the god of thunderstorms?³ Was the old prophetic religion deepened by Solomon's commercial treaties and other cosmopolitan relations? May the time before Amos be called "anteprophetic" time?

These and at least a dozen other important questions which have been raised mostly by the Wellhausen representation of the religious history of Israel have been critically examined, with these two questions in view, by competent Old Testa-

¹The learned men of English tongue as well have been considered and quoted often by me.

²The so-called Kenite Hypothesis. The name of Jahve is discussed in my book on pp. 162-169.

³So Marti, *Geschichte der Israel. Religion* (1907), p. 158.

ment critics, who *do* actually exist outside the Wellhausen school and in spite of it. But in all these researches it could be proved¹ that the Wellhausen construction of the religious history of Israel is disproved in all its essential parts by the unqualified assertions of the Hebrew books of history. For this construction often did not start with the testimonies of historical sources, while these have often been severed from their original position and the accepted principle has mostly been forgotten that the *common* consent of the different sources has to be regarded as of the greatest importance. By avoiding these and other mistakes, it can be proved, in the first place, by positive assertions of the sources, that the patriarchs really existed, and that their religion was a power which could not have been derived from the historical circumstances of their time. Moreover, the true development of the Old Testament religion is indicated, while many changes which were adopted later in the "history, etc.," had to be pronounced artificial products of an evolutionary assumption.

4. Does, then, scientific progress lie in the accentuation of the Wellhausen suppositions about the course of the religious history of Israel? Do matters stand as represented in an address recently delivered (Nov. 1911) in Berne by Karl Marti about "Stand und Aufgabe der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft in der Gegenwart"? In this he adheres to the statements, repeated over and over again in recent publications, of the Wellhausen school of Old Testament criticism, and honors these as the work of "Old Testament science." Only books which share these fundamental views are said to be works which "show the progress of science," but no researches are mentioned in which the justification of Wellhausenian assumptions have been challenged. Vainly one

¹ For details I must ask the readers to refer to my *Geschichte*.

looks (to say nothing of my "Hauptprobleme," 1884), for works like that of James Robertson, or any of the above-mentioned books of Kittel, etc. Nor is the important work of M. J. Lagrange¹ even mentioned.

Such proceedings cannot be called presentation of facts; for, if any one undertakes to give the picture of the "state of the science of Old Testament criticism at the present time," he must needs tell what problems in the science of Old Testament religion are uppermost in our day, and what special attempts are made nowadays to solve them. But if the speaker thinks it right to proclaim as the "state of Old Testament science" what he personally thinks to be right, he forces the other workers on the subject to speak up in order to complete the picture of the present state of the Old Testament science sketched by him. To do this was my duty, being one of the older representatives of Old Testament science, and having always made researches into the religion of the Old Testament my most important study. For the future I trust in this matter, as in others, to an unprejudiced use of the critically examined sources and an impartial consideration of the writings of all co-workers. This only will bring correct results.

¹ *Etudes sur les religions sémitiques* (2d ed. 1905).