

ARTICLE III.

THE WELLHAUSEN THEORY OF THE PENTATEUCH, AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM.

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THE edifice of Pentateuchal Criticism, of which Astruc had laid the foundations a century and half ago, and which a large number of scholars had laboriously helped to rear, each in his way, till Julius Wellhausen gave it its present form, was the glory and pride of Old Testament scholarship till a short time ago. No result seemed to be so sure as the documentary theory. The voices which had been raised against this hypothesis at the outset had gradually died away. Keil, Böhl, Ad. Zahn, Bissell, Green, and Hoedemaker had sunk in the grave, one after the other; Franz Delitzsch in his old age had been more and more convinced of the correctness of the documentary theory; only Rupprecht had continued to raise his voice against it, supported by a few believing Roman Catholic and orthodox Jewish scholars like Kaulen and David Hoffmann. Hardly any thorough scholar could be found who did not bow to the scientific authority of the Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen hypothesis, even though he held the extremely conservative opinions of a König. Nobody really dared question its correctness.

True there was much divergence of opinion about numerous questions of detail, e. g. as to the age of the several parts out of which the Pentateuch had been composed, and the extension of the analysis to the whole text of the Pentateuch. But about the fact itself that the Pentateuch consisted of dif-

ferent strata, diverging especially in time, about the number, course, and characteristics of these different strata, there was sufficient agreement, as a single glance at the "Introductions" and Commentaries on the Pentateuch most widely used at present distinctly proves. Thus though Old Testament scholars were obliged to acknowledge that a good deal further work would be necessary to equip the interior of the edifice of Pentateuchal Criticism in accordance with scientific requirements, and though they still differed entirely as to how this equipment ought to be effected, one thing seemed to be beyond question, viz. that the actual edifice of Pentateuchal Criticism, raised on unshakable foundations and built in splendid fashion, was a brilliant monument, for all time, of the glory of Old Testament Scholarship.

During the last ten years this state of affairs has undergone a radical change. A remarkable turn is taking place in opinion. Objections have been raised to the correctness of the almost supreme Wellhausen hypothesis, which can no longer be waived aside with a single gesture as coming from the traditionalists. And in the circles of Old Testament scholars men have been asking more and more earnestly whether the edifice is indeed as solid as they imagined? A formerly convinced advocate of the documentary theory, a disciple of the great Kuenen, the Dutch professor Eerdmans, has already broken decisively with the current theory.¹ Wellhausen himself has admitted that the latest attack on his celebrated hypothesis has touched its sore point.² Gressmann states that the terms "Jahvist" and "Elohist" can be used only in a very relative sense.³ Sellin joins the doubters too,

¹ *Die Komposition der Genesis* (1908).

² In a letter to Dahse; cf. Dahse, *Wie erklärt sich der gegenwärtige Zustand der Genesis?* (1913), p. 6.

³ *Mose und seine Zeit* (1913), p. 368.

especially in regard to the famous P (Priestly Code).¹ Kittel is convinced of the correctness of the objections to the theory, at least in respect of Gen. i.-x.² Others will follow; and it can be prophesied with increasing probability that the days of the Wellhausen hypothesis of the Pentateuch, to which Lepsius in 1903 did not assign ten years more of life, are at any rate numbered.³

Of course there are still a great many scholars who are not of this opinion.

The learned world does not so easily give up an opinion, which, according to the unanimous consensus of scholars, has been indisputably proved. In the third edition of his Commentary on Genesis (1910), Gunkel still says exultingly of the documentary theory: "An admirable amount of zeal, of sagacity, of genial power of conception, has been spent on this labour; and a work has resulted, of which posterity may be proud."⁴

But neither this high-pitched song of praise nor the defense attempted by others can save the current theory. The objections which have been raised have shown distinctly enough that the edifice of Pentateuchal Criticism has not been founded and built so solidly as the architects themselves thought, but that we can rather apply to it the mocking words of Tobiah: "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh. iv. 3).

The fox that, by undermining the wall of the Wellhausen theory of the Pentateuch, ruins the whole building, is Textual Criticism. For it has rooted up the foundation, on which, since Astruc, the whole documentary theory has been based,

¹ *Neue Kirchlliche Zeitschrift*, 1913, pp. 135, 136, 141, 143-147.

² *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (2d ed., 1912), vol. i. pp. 255, 256.

³ *Reich Christi*, nos. 1, 4, 5.

⁴ *Introduct.*, p. lxxxI.

— the discrimination of the several original strata according to the use of the names of God, *Jahveh* or *Elohim*. With respect to this, scholars had always started from the Massoretic text. Textual criticism, however, which, especially since more use has been made of the ancient translations (particularly of the Septuagint) as means for the determination of the original authentic text, has submitted the Massoretic tradition to a very close investigation, teaches that the criterion of the names of God is of absolutely no value.

For it appears that the number of the variants in the use of the names of God is exceedingly great, especially in the Septuagint. In Genesis alone the Septuagint has 49 variants, and in the first four books of Moses together no less than 180. In September, 1909, Professor Schlögl of Vienna published in the *Expository Times* the results of his investigations on that subject as regards Gen. i. 1—Ex. iii. 12. He says that, in this part of the Pentateuch, the name *Jahveh* is found 148 times in the Massoretic text. In no less than 118 places, however, there are variants, either *Elohim* or *Jahveh Elohim*. The name *Elohim* appears 179 times in the Massoretic text; other texts have *Jahveh* 59 times (47 times *Jahveh Elohim*). Finally, the combination *Jahveh Elohim* is to be found in the Massoretic text 20 times; of these only one passage has no variants (p. 563).

In this state of affairs it is entirely out of the question that the criterion of the names of God can be used to analyze the Pentateuch into documents. That is why the foundation of the current Pentateuchal hypothesis is ruined; but then that hypothesis itself is no longer to be maintained either.

The merit of having pointed to this important matter is especially due to two men: the London barrister Harold M. Wiener and the minister of Freirachdorf (Westerwald) in

Germany, Johannes Dahse. Mr. Wiener published "Studies in Biblical Law" in 1904, followed by a considerable series of articles on the subject of the Pentateuch in the *Churchman* and *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA*, many of which have been reprinted in bookform under the titles "Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism" (1910), and "Pentateuchal Studies" (1912). A popular summary of his publications has been published under the title "The Origin of the Pentateuch" (1910). Mr. Dahse has given himself with particular devotion to the time-consuming and monotonous labor of the comparison of texts and manuscripts, to which we owe several studies from his hand. He first raised objections to the foundation of the current Pentateuchal Criticism in an essay entitled "Textkritische Bedenken gegen den Ausgangspunkt der heutigen Pentateuchkritik," which appeared in the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* (1903), and subsequently elaborated the argument once more in an article in the *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* of 1912, "Naht ein Umschwung in der Pentateuchkritik?" to which he finally added a larger study, in which he also proposes a solution of his own of the Pentateuch problem, "Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage" (1912).

August Klostermann may be called their precursor. As early as 1893 he objected, in his "Der Pentateuch," to the use of the names of God as a criterion for the separation of documents, basing his opinion on the statement that it would not do to consider the Massoretic text identical with the authentic text. Wiener and Dahse show systematically in sharp and circumstantial investigation the correctness of Klostermann's objection, and consequently more and more other scholars sympathize with it, e.g. Redpath, in the *American Journal of Theology*, 1904, pp. 286 ff.; Köberle, in his "Zum Kampf ums Alte Testament," (1906), p. 26; Eerdmans, in his "Die

Komposition der Genesis" (1908); Schlögl, in the *Expository Times*, 1909; Troelstra, in an essay on "The Name of God in the Pentateuch" (1912), etc.

The force of the argument taken from the variability of the names of God in the different texts consequently cannot be denied. The apprehension for the cherished theory, which was roused in the circles of its adherents by this attack, was expressed in a peculiar way in the *Expository Times* of 1909, where the Rev. A. P. Cox, referring to an article of Wiener's, asks (p. 378) whether anybody can refer him to a work or article in which the question touched by Wiener is discussed from the point of view of those who accept the current documentary theory. Principal Skinner, who tries to soothe the perturbed vicar, "does not happen to know a single work which deals exhaustively with the subject from the critical standpoint."¹ And this while himself assuring his readers that the existence of the variants in the names of God was not first discovered by Wiener, but is the common property of Old Testament investigators.² Is not this remarkable? The critics know very well that the names of God are very variable elements of the text, but do not at all reckon with this fact, and build a very radical hypothesis concerning the origin of the Pentateuch on the use of the names of God in the Massoretic text!

Still more remarkable is the conspiracy of silence as to the textual objection to the current Pentateuchal hypothesis. Even in the newest works, such as Steuernagel's "Introduction," and the article "Mosesbücher" by Bertholet in the German encyclopædia "Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart," the argument from textual criticism is totally neglected. Would it not be inferred from this that the adherents

¹ *Loc. cit.*

² *Loc. cit.*

of the theory cannot say much against the textual objection? This presumption grows to certainty when we read what is said by a few champions who have ventured to take up the gauntlet that has been thrown down.

Principal Skinner argues that, in case of difference between the Septuagint and the Massoretic text, the probability is in favor of the latter, for two reasons: (1) Because the Massoretic text is supported in most cases by the Samaritan Pentateuch; (2) Because Jewish copyists would be more likely than Greek copyists to keep the difference between *Jahveh* and *Elohim* clearly in sight. Evidently Dr. Skinner does not himself think this reasoning conclusive, for immediately afterwards he has recourse to quite another line of argument, in which he is followed by Sellin, the German apologist of the documentary theory, viz. that while it is historically true that the discrimination in the use of the names of God offered the first clue to the solution of the Pentateuchal question, yet it is now only a single, and in the estimation of many higher critics actually a very small, element in the documentary theory. And so, though it were proved that the criterion of the names of God is perfectly worthless, the documentary theory would even in that event remain sufficiently sure and well-confirmed. "It would not be the first time that a wrong clue had led to true results." He points to the discovery of America, which is no less a fact because Columbus sailed for India.¹

In his detailed discussion of the matter in the *Expositor* for April, May, June, July, and September, 1913, Dr. Skinner adduces another argument: "The Hebrew text possesses credentials to which no version, and perhaps the Septuagint least of all, can pretend."² He consequently tries to save the cur-

¹ *Loc. cit.*

² Vol. v. p. 290. Cf. also vol. v. p. 497; vol. vi. pp. 23, 24.

rent analysis of the Pentateuch by depreciating the value of the Septuagint. But it is sufficiently known that, as a rule, the higher critics do not hold the Septuagint so unreliable as Dr. Skinner here claims. It is without question that they make a wide use of the Septuagint in their criticism of the text, as all the critical Commentaries abundantly show, e.g. even Dr. Skinner's own Commentary on Genesis.¹

Sellin in his defense² touches very lightly on the real textual difficulty. He prefers to seek strength in disputing Dahse's own solution, as does Dr. Skinner in the bulk of his *Expositor* discussion. With respect to the textual objection he is, however, driven to acknowledge that Dahse has distinctly proved that the names of God are variable elements³ of the text, and that in many cases at least more care is required in applying the documentary theory,⁴ though he maintains that the absolute uselessness of the criterion of the names of God has not yet been proved. As has been said above, he has recourse to the same reasoning as Skinner, that the documentary theory stands sufficiently firm if the criterion of the names of God is left out.

The defense of the threatened entrenchment has evidently lost all charm for the adherents of the current Pentateuchal hypothesis. After a feint they abandon the bulwark raised by

¹Dahse, in his reply to Skinner, in the *Expositor* of December, 1913, shows that Dr. Skinner himself in his five articles admits the superiority of the versions or the uncertainty of the original reading, in so many places, that, through these admissions, the worthlessness of the criterion of the divine names is proved.

²Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 1913, pp. 119-148; though this defender seems to have lost his reliance on the case he is defending, as stated *supra*, p. 394.

³According to Skinner, however, the names of God are "a remarkably stable element of the text" (*Expositor*, vol. vi. p. 24).

⁴This is also admitted by Skinner, *Expositor*, vol. v. p. 291; vol. vi. pp. 267, 288.

Astruc, in order to retreat behind other supports, thinking that they will even then be able to defend the attacked fortress efficiently.

However it appears to us that the key of the position lies in the discrimination of the divine names, and that the fall of Wellhausen's hypothesis is only a question of time, as the defenders of the documentary theory do not think themselves able to maintain this.

When Skinner calls the use of the names of God an element of small importance in the estimation of many higher critics, Wiener challenges him to prove this from the writings of adherents of the school of Wellhausen.¹ I do not know whether Dr. Skinner has answered this challenge, and I think it will be a difficult task for him. Professor Eerdmans, who for many years was a convinced advocate of the documentary theory, says that Dahse is right when he tries to show that the names of God are indeed the principal point, and that the other criteria are of a most problematic nature.² But Eerdmans may be suspect, because he has shown himself an opponent of the current theory. So let me point to Gunkel's "Genesis," where we read of the difference between J and E: "Their difference is to be demonstrated principally in their language, of which the most important example is that J before Moses says *Jahveh*, E *Elohim*."³ Or to cite another witness who is equally above suspicion, Steuernagel, "Allgemeine Einleitung in den Hexateuch,"⁴ in order to prove the soundness of the documentary hypothesis, adduces, as a principal argument, "If all those narratives in Gen. i.-xix. which show the

¹ Expository Times, 1909, p. 474.

² Theol. Tijdschrift, 1913, p. 270.

³ Introd., p. lxxxvii (3d ed.).

⁴ Nowack's Handkommentarum, A. T. (1900).

divine name *Elohim* be read consecutively and also those with the divine name *Jahveh*, both produce a proper coherence" (p. 267). And a little further on it is again the difference of the names of God which, for him, forms the first clue to separation of the documents "so that there result two *Elohistic* and one *Jahvistic* document" (p. 268). In the third place, I draw attention to the "Bible" of Kautzsch, which popularizes the results of Old Testament criticism for Germany, as the translation of Leiden does for Holland. In its third edition, which has been entirely rewritten (1909-10), *Jahvist* and *Elohist* are distinguished according to the "nearly constant use of the divine names *Jahveh* and *Elohim*" (vol. i. p. 3). I think that is enough to show that, in the estimation of the higher critics themselves, the documentary theory rests principally on the criterion of the names of God.

And so the conclusion is fully justified, that if this criterion is no longer to be maintained in face of the textual objections, the whole documentary theory will have to fall.

It makes no difference in this question that, apart from the varying use of the divine names, all sorts of other arguments are adduced to defend the theory. When starting from a given point we have at last come to a certain result, it will indeed always appear possible subsequently to find yet other grounds for it which could never in themselves have led to that result with certainty, but lend it more probability once it has been attained, whether rightly or wrongly. If, however, the starting point is proved to have been wrong, the result reached from it is erroneous, and in this case it cannot be saved by such accessory grounds of probability.

Here I will just revert to the example of Skinner: the discovery of America is no less real because Columbus sailed for India. That is true, of course! Columbus really found

land; but if he had seen on the sea an aërial mirage, and had given it the name of "The Indies," would any real discovery have resulted? The question is only whether the critics of the Pentateuch have really found *land*; that is to say, whether the documentary theory really is an irrefutable scientific result, sufficiently confirmed by conclusive grounds, even without the criterion of the names of God. And it is far from being that! The names of God furnish the main argument; so all the other arguments adduced are only secondary and accessory, not sufficient by themselves to make the documentary theory acceptable.

I will just mention here what these grounds are. Sellin divides them into three groups:—

First. Those of an historical nature (showing a different conception of the ancient history);

Second. Those of a religious nature (showing a different conception of the Deity, of His revelation and of His will);

Third. Those of a grammatical nature (lexicological and grammatical differences).¹

Eerdmans has pronounced sentence on these grounds in a single phrase: "It is true that critical acumen has also tried to discover other characteristic features of the sources and has even thought it permissible to assign to the authors entirely different theological ways of thought, but all this was not discovered till the analysis founded on the names of God had been effected and is moreover of a most problematic nature."²

Moreover, those who have disputed the criterion of the divine names have not neglected the opportunity of overthrowing all sorts of other matters adduced in support of the Criticism

¹ *Neue Kirchl. Zeitschrift*, 1913, p. 138.

² *Theol. Tijdschr.*, 1913, p. 270.

of the Pentateuch. Eerdmans's "*Alttestamentliche Studien*" contain a continuous contestation of the current theory, and Wiener has not grown weary of answering the criticism on a number of matters of detail in a stream of articles. Dahse, too, examines other arguments for the documentary theory; among others, the differing use of Jacob and Israel, the Story of the Great Deluge, etc.

In concluding this Essay I shall show by the most objective argument,—that from grammar,—of how small importance the other grounds for the documentary theory are. The historical and religious grounds are so subjective that no conclusive force at all can be adjudged to them. How can it be proved in a scientifically convincing manner that different historical and religious ideas form the foundations of different strata of the Pentateuch? Here everything depends on the way in which such parts are read by the investigator. But when in a particular portion of the book there occurs a word or turn of phrase which is not found in any other portion, we have, at any rate, a fact that can be ascertained and controlled by everybody.

So this is objective! Of course everybody agrees that a small number of data of that kind prove nothing by themselves as to the existence of different authors; for the same author will often express his ideas differently in different pieces of his own writing, especially when they relate to different times and treat of different subjects. Moreover, he may be influenced by the language of documents or writings which he had before him. So that if the conclusion that different authors are speaking is indeed to be called scientifically justified, we certainly should have to find very notorious and numerous facts in respect of lexicology and grammar. Well, then, the last study which has instituted a very exact inquiry

into this matter and is founded on critical canons that are beyond suspicion,¹ has not been able to do more than bring together 13 characteristics for J and E (so the differentiation of J and E with the grammatical criterion seems altogether impossible), 14 for D, and 17 for P. Can such meager data give the documentary theory even a show of justification?

Consequently, now that the criterion of the names of God cannot be maintained against the objections of Textual Criticism, the day is not far distant when the Wellhausen hypothesis of the Pentateuch, the glory of which is already dying away in the scientific world, will crumble into ruins.

¹J. Kräutlein, *Die sprachlichen Verschiedenheiten in den Hexateuchquellen* (1908).