

Notes on the Census Numbers.

I. BY PROFESSOR FLINDERS PETRIE, D.C.L., F.R.S.

AS Mr. Wiener's article is of a class of thought which seems not unusual, it is well to point out more clearly the question of standpoint. There are any number of shades of view possible, but for brevity we will only notice three stages :

(1) There is the full acceptance of the "600,000 men beside women and children," which seems to be Mr. Wiener's view. Of course, if anyone prefers to let every other consideration of possibility vanish, he is welcome to this position, and to reject every suggestion which is incompatible with any passage of the received text. Only in that case the vast majority of ordinary readers will resort to position (3) instead.

(2) There is the view that there must have been some documentary basis for so detailed an account, however impossible the narrative may now be to common-sense. The peculiarity of the hundreds in the census is an absolute, but hitherto unnoticed, fact of the text, now brought to light ; and certainly Mr. Wiener is mistaken in stating "that the question of the numbers remains precisely where it was" before I drew attention to this. The question is for ever different after this crucial fact is in view.

The passages incompatible with this view are equally incompatible with any historical view of the numbers, and position (1) must be resorted to if anyone is to maintain the half-shekel tax account—the exactitude of the statements of "people" or "men" (which are, *e.g.*, certainly confused in David's census, according to Rehoboam's census)—the 600,000 men leaving Egypt—the numbers of Levi—the vague statements of thousands without numbers in some early narratives, while the statement of the numbers of firstborn is quite incompatible with the total of 600,000 men. If these passages are to be accepted, there is no explanation of the separate hundreds in the census, and position (1) is the only possible attitude, while we shut our eyes to its contra-indications.

(3) There is the usual Higher Critic's position that all such accounts are fabulous before 800 B.C. And this has so far been the only definite standpoint for those who cannot possibly accept position (1).

In showing a probable origin for the apparently corrupted and impossible form of the census lists as given, the whole of these items are thus accounted for ; and the statement that they were adult males only and not all the people is exactly like the similar corruption in David's census which I note above.

In my own view as an historical student, the reasonable origin of the higher numbers which I proposed serves as a basis for the discrimination between the original material and the great mass of additions which have been accreted upon it in all good faith by later scribes.

If anyone rejects such a position, let him adopt positions (1) or (3); only in that case discussion is closed, as it would be with a Roman Catholic about Lourdes or with an atheist about Colonel Ingersoll. It is useless to discuss when divided by a fundamental difference.

II. BY HAROLD M. WIENER, M.A., LL.B.

By the courtesy of the Editor, I have been able to see a proof of the above note, and would respectfully submit that yet a fourth position is possible, viz. : That no satisfactory explanation of the difficulty of the numbers has yet been suggested. I note that Professor Petrie rests his case entirely on the peculiarity of the hundreds, and is prepared to reject every statement inconsistent with his theory, including every single item of the first census list itself, since in each case we are told that the number given is that of "every male from twenty years old and upwards." Should not any attempt to solve the difficulties of the census numbers take into account *all* the available data ?

