

The Criticism of the Pentateuch.¹

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IT may well seem surprising that the orthodox Jews have not entered more actively into the discussions relating to the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament. There are differences of opinion on the bearings of the prevalent conclusions of that criticism upon the Christian religion, but it would seem there can be none as to its bearings on the ancient and traditional Jewish religion. It may be a question whether its alleged results are or are not logically compatible with the defence of the Christian faith, but it would seem unquestionable that they are quite incompatible with a belief in the Jewish religion, as exhibited in the time of our Lord Himself, and with the historical Judaism of the last two thousand years. That religion is founded on the conviction that the Pentateuch contains a faithful record of direct revelations made by God to Moses. Much may, perhaps, be allowed for the introduction of later glosses into the text, and for considerable corruption in the text itself; but if, as the current criticism assumes, the narratives of the Pentateuch are, generally speaking, "unhistorical," the ancient religion of the Jews is founded on an illusion. It might, therefore, have been expected that this criticism would have been earnestly attacked by Jewish writers, and that its most zealous opponents would have been Jewish Rabbis. But this has not been the case. Some very learned Jewish criticism has, indeed, been directed against the Wellhausen hypothesis by Jews, as, for instance, by Dr. Hoffmann, the Principal of the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, whose work "Die wichtigsten Instanzen gegen die Graf Wellhausensche Hypothese," published in 1904, has received no adequate attention. Some Jewish writers, like Mr. Montefiore, have accepted and popular-

¹ "Essays on Pentateuchal Criticism," by Harold M. Wiener, M.A., LL.B., of Lincoln's Inn; Barrister-at-Law. London: Elliot Stock. 3s. 6d. net.

ized such criticism; but, for the most part, the great Jewish scholars have seemed to disdain to take much notice of critical attacks on the foundations of their faith. It was not, indeed, unnatural if, secure in the unbroken historical tradition of at least two thousand years, they were content to be silent "until this tyranny were overpast." It may well seem to an orthodox Jew as not less absurd that the historic consciousness of his race should be contradicted, than it would seem to an Englishman that the historic truth of his own Anglo-Saxon records should be denied. Nevertheless, it could not but be hoped that Jewish scholars would some day condescend to come into the critical arena, and join issue with those who maintained that the religion of their race, the religion to which our Lord and His Apostles did homage, was founded on a fiction. The key to many of the critical and legal problems at issue in the Old Testament would seem to lie with them, and their contribution to the discussion has by many been anxiously expected.

For this reason, in particular, the laborious and acute work which has recently been published by Mr. Harold Wiener, entitled "Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism," deserves a cordial welcome. Mr. Wiener is a member of Lincoln's Inn, and is thus qualified, not only by his Jewish training, but by legal education, to enter on the discussion of the contentions of the Wellhausen school in Germany, which are represented by a powerful school at Oxford and Cambridge in this country. These questions involve not only literary, but historical and legal issues, and the light of Jewish intelligence and experience, such as Mr. Wiener can furnish, is indispensable. He had previously published a valuable volume, entitled "Studies in Biblical Law," in which he criticized, as it seemed to us with damaging effect, much of the treatment by the Wellhausen school of the laws of the Pentateuch, and showed much cause for distrusting, for example, some of Dr. Driver's arguments on the subject. But the critics in this country have shown an indisposition to take notice of hostile criticism which compares very unfavourably with the spirit of critical circles in

Germany. As we write, for instance, an important work comes into our hands, written at the request of the Saxon Government by Dr. Kittel, the learned Professor of Leipzig, who frankly admits ("Die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft," p. 57) that, though Wellhausen has rendered, as he thinks, greater services to the science of the Old Testament than any living man, yet "his theory of the Pentateuch has not proved tenable in the form represented by him." But in England, to the discredit, as we must think, of our critics, no such fair recognition has been given to the objections of conservative scholars. Dr. Orr has been somewhat better treated, but the neglect of Mr. Wiener's first book is an example of the unfair and uncandid temper of which we complain. It will not, we think, be possible to treat his present work with similar neglect. We regret to observe, indeed, in a review published last month, an article by Mr. W. E. Addis, which briefly dismisses Mr. Wiener's theories as "incredible," and which does not even attempt to meet the main objections which he urges against the prevalent hypothesis. Mr. Wiener's argument is too learned and too effective to be thus disposed of. Whether his own suggestions prove tenable or not, he has adduced objections to the main contentions of the current criticism which seem of great weight. They are to a large extent the arguments of an expert in Jewish literature and law, and, unless distinctly answered, they must seriously invalidate the present critical position.

Mr. Wiener deals with the statement of the critical view as presented in "the Hexateuch . . . arranged in its constituent documents," by Mr. Estlin Carpenter and Mr. Harford Battersby, and discusses in full detail its cardinal arguments. He seems to us to show that the so-called "clue to the documents," in the statement in Exod. vi. 2-8, embodies a far deeper meaning than the critics suppose. They take it to record the mere revelation of a name. With a Jewish writer's deeper appreciation of the meaning of a name in ancient times, he urges that the passage is the record of the establishment of a new relation between God and the people of Israel, and that the use of the

name as a mere mark of documentary origin is to degrade its real meaning. He dwells with great force on the remarkable variations in the texts and versions of the Pentateuch in the use of the names Jehovah and Elohim, and he exposes with a sarcasm which, though sometimes too rough, is often well founded the elaborate divisions of passages between different authors which the critics base on these uncertain readings. We do not think he is at all too severe on the arbitrary manner in which critics appeal to imaginary editors or redactors to explain away phrases which are inconsistent with their theories. But he proceeds to the discussion of matters of historical substance, and he deals in detail with the contradictions alleged by the critics in the narratives of Exodus and Numbers. In this branch of his subject Mr. Wiener's discussion has one valuable characteristic. He is fully sensible of the difficulties presented by the narratives as they at present stand in our Hebrew texts, and he recognizes that some adequate explanation of these difficulties is required. He believes this to consist in the fact that our present text is both corrupt and confused, and the solution he offers is based on some rearrangements of the narrative. He believes that "the secure basis of the inquiry will in the future be the indubitable Mosaic authenticity of the speeches in Deuteronomy (apart from certain well-known glosses)" (p. 171), and that, "while it is undoubtedly the fact that the Pentateuch contains post-Mosaic elements, the possible extent of such elements will be recognized as very much more restricted than is now supposed to be the case, while the wild theories at present current as to documents, schools of writers, forgers of laws, revelation by literary fraud, etc., will be recognized as merely absurd. On the other hand, the duties of the textual critic will be seen to possess far more importance than has been generally allowed."

In addition to this line of argument, Mr. Wiener concludes by attacking directly the first three chapters of Wellhausen's "Prolegomena," and charges that writer with errors and oversights of the gravest character. In particular, he makes out

what seems to us a strong case for showing that grievous confusion has been introduced by Wellhausen and his followers by the careless use of the term "sanctuary." "A place where there is casual mention of a lay altar and a lay sacrifice is regarded as a 'sanctuary,' and when it has been established that a multiplicity of lay altars were in use, the leap is made to a multiplicity of sanctuaries" (p. 187). "The ancient Hebrews had a custom by which any layman could in certain circumstances offer sacrifice," but this was quite consistent with the existence of a central sanctuary, as at Shiloh. This point has more than once been strongly urged by Mr. Wiener, and we are not aware that any adequate notice has been taken of it. We have not space to examine the argument adequately in these pages; but we claim for Mr. Wiener, as a matter of right, that his contention should be patiently and thoroughly examined, and not pushed aside as unworthy of attention merely because it conflicts with the dominant theory.

We could wish that Mr. Wiener had sometimes been less vehement in his denunciations of the critics, but we can make allowance for a Jew who is defending the sacred traditions of his race against what appear to him reckless and unfounded attacks. Wellhausen, at all events, is in no position to complain of contemptuous language in an opponent. But in substance Mr. Wiener's book contains a learned, laborious, and acute argument, covering the more essential parts of the critical position. Whether his own solutions of the difficulties he acknowledges will prove to be tenable is matter for discussion; but at the least he has brought together in this volume a mass of learned observation and argument which cannot be disregarded, and we await with interest the answers which it claims in detail from the representatives of the critical school in this country.

