

## THE SYNAGOGUE *VERSUS* WELLHAUSEN

THREE volumes of "an Edition of the Pentateuch and Haftorahs—the Lessons from the Prophets—in Hebrew and English, with a popular commentary for use in Synagogue, School, and Home" have now been issued by the Very Reverend Dr. Joseph Herman Hertz, Chief Rabbi, London, assisted by a number of Jewish Doctors. It is thus almost an *ex cathedra* utterance on the part of the English Synagogue, and deserves respectful attention. Apart from the important fact that it is a Jewish, not a Christian, commentary, it is a work of outstanding merit. In this brief article we propose to notice only the opinions expressed with reference to what is frequently entitled "the Wellhausen theory".

For some years Wellhausenism has been steadily falling into disrepute. Half a century ago it broke in upon our Church life with suddenness. Some were startled by it, others were fascinated. Very soon it captured the minds of the majority, and became the prevailing fashion. A number of well-known scholars wrote convincingly against this revolutionary hypothesis, but their arguments were disregarded and for the most part left unanswered. As time went on, however, weak points in the theory thrust themselves into notice; it was necessary to strengthen these by new combinations, until the scheme became so complicated that it began to fall under its own weight. And now, to quote Dr. Sellin: "If I rightly understand our time, and especially the modern science of the Old Testament, the era of Wellhausen, in spite of all that we have learned of him, may be considered, with us in Germany, as antiquated and wholly of the past." Of modern writers who have antagonized this theory, one can mention only a few names: Harold M. Wiener, Edouard Naville, Wilhelm Möller, Martin Kegel, A. S. Yahuda.

From the side of archaeology, many authoritative writers frankly dissociate themselves from the Wellhausen theory. One of the latest works on this subject is *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (1932) by Dr. Albright, Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. He recalls the fact that "practically all of the Old Testament scholars of standing in Europe and America held these or similar views ('similar',

that is, to those of Wellhausen) until very recently. Now, however, the situation is changing with the greatest rapidity, since the theory of Wellhausen will not bear the test of archaeological examination." He has much more to say to the same effect.

Let us now turn to the volumes already edited by the Chief Rabbi—his commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. Valuable as these are, his "Deuteronomy" will be awaited with special interest.

#### GENESIS

Dr. Hertz begins with a pointed repudiation of the Wellhausen hypothesis. "My conviction", he says, "that the criticism of the Pentateuch associated with the name of Wellhausen is a perversion of history and a desecration of religion, is unshaken; likewise my refusal to eliminate the Divine either from history or from human life." In later volumes he proposes to examine the Graf-Wellhausen theory in detail, when he hopes to "show the utter baselessness of this revolutionary theory of Israel's history and religion." In this volume he refers to it as occasion calls—in plain but measured speech. A rather prolonged quotation may be permitted:

"Even a generation ago, Bible critics looked upon the Patriarchal stories in Genesis as a tissue of fabrications, at the best as legends, but in no case as authentic history. No theory was too fantastic or too blasphemous to be put forward as a serious explanation of the narrative. One critic declared Abram to be 'a free creation of unconscious art'; another turned him into a 'fetish stone'; a third identified him with the 'starry heavens'; and a fourth made of him 'a sacred locality'. One of the greatest of these Bible critics (Dillmann), who at one time shared those preposterous views, eventually felt himself impelled to state: 'We have no right to explain these Genesis narratives as pure fiction. They rest in essentials on sound historical recollection.' This view is now that of all responsible students of the Bible. 'The patriarchal period has been so illumined by recent discoveries', says the author of the Commentary on Genesis in the *International Critical Series*, 'that it is no longer possible to doubt its substantial historicity. Contemporary documents reveal a set of conditions into which the patriarchal narratives fit perfectly, and which are so different from those prevailing under the monarchy that the situation

could not possibly have been imagined by an Israelite of that age' (John Skinner). The words of the Psalmist, 'Truth shall spring out of the earth,' have been literally fulfilled, and the very stones of the Nile and the Euphrates valleys, of Palestine, and Asia Minor, have given their decisive testimony in vindication of the Torah."

Dr. Hertz refuses to admit that the books of the law were pieced together by excerpts from documents compiled in the days of the Hebrew monarchy, or later. He shows that the use of the Divine Names is determined by the subject-matter of the record or prophecy; and in regard to the Deluge he reminds us that all the features which, in the Hebrew Bible, might suggest the mingling of diverse and ill-accordant accounts, are also to be found in the Chaldean texts, which were, at least, as early as the time of Abraham. He adds: "In the light of recent excavations every reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of the account of Melchizedek is removed." He says again: "Archaeological exploration has now established the existence of an early Canaanite civilization in the Plain (the Circle of Jordan). The pottery and *all* the other ancient finds, however, are older than the eighteenth pre-Christian century at the latest, and point to a great convulsion of nature, which destroyed the towns to the South of the Dead Sea" (Albright). "There is a total absence of any trace of civilization from that time till probably the Byzantine period—2,500 years after Abraham" (Kyle). On the twenty-second chapter, which tells of "the binding of Isaac", he makes this striking comment: "Few chapters of the Bible have had a more potent and lasting influence on the lives and souls of men."

#### EXODUS

The critical questions arising from the book of Exodus are mostly referred onward to the Commentary on Leviticus. But Dr. Hertz takes up a number of points in passing. He retorts on those who hold by Kuenen's opinion that the Hebrew religion is a natural offshoot from the ancient Semitic stock: "A study of Israel's amazing story will strengthen any unbiassed seeker of the Truth in the conviction that Israel's Vision of the Divine is different not only in degree *but in kind* from that of any other nation; and that, therefore, there has indeed been a unique impact of the Spirit of God upon the soul of Israel." He finds

a strong argument for the historical truth of the patriarchal narratives in the fact that these are by no means such as would be imagined or penned by one who wrote to glorify his nation or ancestry. And he shows how critical scholars have misinterpreted Exodus vi. 3, and used this mistaken interpretation to buttress their own theories.

In refuting the hypothesis of "non-existent authors and irresponsible 'Redactors'" he quotes Dr. Naville: "The plurality of sources is *assumed* by the Critics as an indisputable fact. Unity of authorship is ruled out by them from the very first. They must at all costs discover divers authors, in explanation of a perfectly simple narrative which unfolds itself in the most natural manner. It matters little that the text itself is altogether out of harmony with the conception of the Critics. The text must adjust itself to these conceptions. If it does not, what does it matter: *it* is at fault. They correct the text; with the result that it agrees with their theory."

Remarking on the fact that "though the main assumption on which the critical speculations are based has been proved false, the Higher Critics remained as imperturbable as ever," Dr. Hertz continues: "An unimpeachable witness like Professor Kittel, the eminent historian, recently wrote: 'The facts themselves had rendered a large portion of Wellhausen's hypothesis untenable. One would have thought that Wellhausen would have taken note of this new knowledge. But he never retracted or modified any of his theories, and his followers continued writing and building on his hypothesis as if nothing had happened.'" Dr. Hertz confirms these words with an emphasis which leads him to make use of italics: "*Nothing is more characteristic of the Higher Critic than the way he refuses to revise his views, in the face of historical discovery which disproves those views.*"

#### LEVITICUS

In this book there are many points at which Dr. Hertz comes into collision with modern critical opinions. First of all, there is sacrifice. He writes: "There are many theories as to the rise of sacrifice. Those associated with the names of W. R. Smith, H. Spencer, and J. G. Frazer, though highly ingenious, are now generally regarded as untenable." He proceeds to show this in detail.

There is a useful note on the "scapegoat". He disowns the later Jewish idea that "Azazel" was a demon—a satyr inhabiting waste places. He holds that the word *Azazel* is not a proper name but a rare Hebrew noun meaning "dismissal" or "entire removal". "It is the ancient technical term for the entire removal of the sin and guilt of the community, that was symbolized by the sending away of the goat into the wilderness."

Passing by other matters of importance, we come to Dr. Hertz's defence of the antiquity and Mosaic authorship of the Levitical Code. It would take more space than one can fairly claim even to summarize the argument. Let the following sentences stand for much besides :

"It must be clearly understood that this idea of a 'Priestly code' and of its late origin is nothing more than pure hypothesis, and there is not a shred of evidence to show that it ever constituted a separate work. In fact, the whole Documentary theory as propounded by Julius Wellhausen and his followers—i.e. that the Pentateuch consists of separate 'documents' of different date and authorship—rests on unproved assumptions. It is easy to make any theory look plausible, if the facts are selected or trimmed judiciously; and Bible Critics are most judicious in selecting the facts and in trimming them to suit their purpose. . . . Outstanding scholars, like Professor Sayce, have from the first pronounced the Documentary theory of the Pentateuch to be a 'baseless fabric of subjective imagination'. Others have come to share his view, realizing more and more the insuperable objections to the theory of the late origin of the Levitical legislation. The whole Critical theory is to-day being questioned on fundamental issues. Nevertheless, the popularizers of theological literature ignore altogether the existence of any other opinion than that of the Critics, and they continue to write as if the lateness of Leviticus were indeed one of the 'finalities of scholarship.'"

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