

The Priests and the Levites in Ezekiel xlv. 7-15.

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LAST year THE EXPOSITORY TIMES had a preliminary notice of Professor A. van Hoonacker's important work, *Le sacerdoce lévitique dans la loi et dans l'histoire des Hébreux* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1899, price 8s. 6d.). A fuller review was promised, however, and this was entrusted to me.

To subject the whole of van Hoonacker's work to close criticism would be almost tantamount to writing a new book. Hence I must confine myself to the examination of one principal part of his work. It will readily be conceded that no part yields in importance to the section which deals with the statements contained in the Book of Ezekiel relating to the Priests and Levites. Professor van Hoonacker himself has shown the far-reaching significance he attaches to this section by publishing it also in the *Revue Biblique*.

Van Hoonacker naturally commences his discussion of the statements in question by an exegesis of Ezk 44⁷⁻¹⁵, which has been called by S. I. Curtiss (*The Levitical Priests*, p. 68) 'the modern critic's bridge.' In recent times this passage has been frequently examined, not only in the commentaries on Ezekiel, but elsewhere. This is done, for instance, by Douglas in his article on 'Ezekiel's Temple' in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, 1898, p. 515 ff.; J. Köberle, *Die Tempelsänger im A.T.*, 1899, p. 76 f.; W. Möller, *Hist.-krit. Bedenken gegen die Graf-Wellhausen'sche Hypothese*, 1899, p. 66 ff.; G. Finke, *Wer hat die fünf Bücher Moses verfasst?* (1900) p. 108 f. But all that is contained in these places is far surpassed in importance by the present work of van Hoonacker. Hence we shall be content to examine the new light which he has sought to shed on the above passage of Ezekiel.

The first important point in Ezk 44^{7ff.} is that the prophet reproaches the Israelites with having permitted 'foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh,' to enter the sanctuary of Jehovah (v. 7^a). One cannot but be reminded of the Gibeonites, who, according to Jos 9²⁷, were spared on condition of consenting to become hewers of wood and drawers of water in the sanctuary. But I would point also to Zec 14^{21b},

according to which 'there shall no more be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD.' Van Hoonacker remarks (p. 191), 'Ezekiel clearly presupposes that the functions, the entrusting of which to foreigners was a breach of the covenant, ought to have been discharged by members of the tribe of Levi.' But the opposite of 'foreigner and uncircumcised' is 'Israelite,' and is it certain that the prophet had no other possibility in mind than that those functions were to be exercised by those who belonged to the tribe of Levi? Van Hoonacker, answering this question in the affirmative, puts the further question, 'Was it the prophet's view that all members of the tribe of Levi had one and the same original right and the same obligation in the matter of the various functions that were the prerogative of the clergy?' (p. 192). But neither is this question of decisive importance for the understanding and the appreciation of the passage before us. The first essential point is that the persons of whom the prophet speaks in v. 10 are told that they are to be degraded from their present position. For a punishment is threatened upon them (vv. 10^b, 12^b), and the prohibition to exercise a function can be called a punishment only if the persons in question had the acknowledged right to perform that function. But if the prescription that one part of the tribe of Levi was to be subject to the other (Nu 4²⁷, etc.) had already been publicly recognized in the time of Ezekiel, then the injunction that one part of this tribe was not to exercise the priestly office (v. 13^a) could not have been represented at all as a punishment inflicted on them. The importance of this point is expressly recognized by van Hoonacker, who says, 'The form of penalty inflicted on the unfaithful priests consists in their degradation to the rank of porters,' etc. (p. 192). Nevertheless he declares (p. 193 f.) that Ezekiel 'presupposes, at least in theory, the existence of two quite distinct classes of cultus-officials within the tribe of Levi. The one class included those members of the tribe who had the lower duties assigned to them, the other embraced those who were not legally bound to discharge these lower duties, because the obligation to perform them

constituted in future (*désormais constituait*) a degradation and a punishment.' Do the terms *désormais* and *constituait* harmonize here? How does a verb in the past tense suit the word *désormais*? Would it not be necessary to say *constituera*? I should never have thought of raising this question but that the imperfect *constituait* appears to me to be an involuntary sign of the suppositive character of van Hoonacker's explanation of Ezk 44⁷⁻¹⁵. He does not take the text as it is, or treat the words of the prophet as documentary evidence for the legal standing of the members of the tribe of Levi. But let us return to examine the particular opinions expressed by van Hoonacker.

First of all, there is a contradiction between the word *dégradation* (p. 192) and *constituait* (p. 194). The admission that in v.^{10b} a degradation of these particular members of the tribe of Levi is announced, and the view that the very same persons were previously bound as a matter of fact to discharge the same lowly offices, contradict one another. Is this self-contradictory attitude of van Hoonacker occasioned by a comparison between Ezk 44⁷⁻¹⁵ and 2 K 23^{8f.}? During the reign of Josiah, to be sure, all priests (כהנים) who had ministered for the people of Israel at the *bāmōth*, were brought to Jerusalem (v.^{8a}), and were not permitted to ascend the altar there (v.^{9a}). But this measure did not sanction any new stage in the legal standing of the members of the tribe of Levi. As far as the divine directions were concerned, even after this action on the part of king Josiah, all members of the tribe of Levi were still entitled to exercise the priestly office. The divine abrogation of this hitherto existing right was brought about by the prophet Ezekiel.

Or, are the contradictions in which van Hoonacker involves himself, due to a comparison with other passages of the Book of Ezekiel? He turns first to 44¹⁵ and remarks, 'the Zadokite priests themselves were, according to the prophet, and continued to be, Levites' (p. 194). But this statement is based upon a confusion between the two ideas which the word *lewijjim* conveys in the O.T. In many passages it designates particular persons as belonging to the tribe of Levi (cf. Jos 3⁸ 8³³, etc., Jer 33^{18, 21f.}). Elsewhere the word characterizes those to whom it is applied as assistants of the priests (Ezr 6²⁰, Neh 8^{7, 9} 9^{4ff.} 12⁴⁷, etc.). What is its meaning in Ezk 44⁷⁻¹⁵?

In v.¹⁰ *ha-lewijjim* must have the first of the above two significations. For the parties spoken of are to be punished for having taken part in idolatrous worship (vv.^{10b, 12b}), they are not to be allowed to discharge the priestly office in the sanctuary of Jahweh (לֹא-יִגְשׁוּ אֵלַי לְכַהֵן לִי, v.^{13a}). They are to suffer degradation, as van Hoonacker himself has expressly admitted previously (p. 192). Then, in the other instance in which *lewijjim* occurs, in 44⁷⁻¹⁵, it appears in the collocation הַלְוִיִּים הַכֹּהֲנִים (v.^{15a}). Here again it has confessedly the first of its two senses. The other sense of the word *lewijjim* does not present itself at all in 44⁷⁻¹⁵, a passage in which the prophet, so far from presupposing that the term *lewijjim* designates a subordinate class of cultus officials, actually employs the term as an attribute of כהנים, 'priests' (v.^{15a}).

Further, van Hoonacker examines the list of duties to be imposed upon the degraded priests, and argues that 'the terms used in v.¹¹ must have a special sense, exactly fixed by tradition, before Ezekiel could employ them as he does in this passage' (p. 194). It will perhaps be admitted that this argument is, to begin with, rather wanting in clearness. For the functions mentioned in v.^{11a} were so obvious that the terms used for them did not need to be fixed by tradition. Besides, the priesthood which had been established for centuries at the central sanctuary, may have obtained, as a matter of use and wont, a precedence in the actual performance of the legal ordinances, and a certain partition of the ritual functions may have established itself in practice. But that is not the point. Practice could not abrogate theoretical right. Hence those expressions which occur in Ezk 44¹¹ regarding certain branches of the duties at the sanctuary, do not prevent the conclusion that from the point of view of fundamental law all parts of the temple service were equally permitted to all families of the tribe of Levi.

Are not the Zadokites, however, already presupposed in 40⁴⁶ and 43¹⁹ as the priests of the sanctuary (p. 194), and are not inferior cultus officials also mentioned in 40⁴⁶ (p. 195)? But in 40⁴⁶ כֹּהֲנֵי שְׁמֵרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַבַּיִת are spoken of. Van Hoonacker does not, indeed, emphasize (p. 195) the circumstance that the title כהנים, 'priests,' is employed here. He thinks to do sufficient justice

to the force of this circumstance by noting that the 'porters' at the time of king Joash are called 'priests' in the Book of Kings. He quotes no passage, but we read in 2 K 12¹⁰, הַכֹּהֲנִים שְׂמָרֵי הַפֶּתַח. What follows from this expression? This, that *kōhānīm*, 'priests,' under certain circumstances, discharged also the office of keeping the threshold of the sanctuary. What clearer proof could we have that the concept of *kōhēn* had in early times a wide range? What clearer indication of the legal basis from which Ezekiel started in sketching his programme? Instead of calling attention to this wider use of *kōhānīm*, van Hoonacker thinks he has discovered an opposition to it in 40⁴⁶. This he finds in the circumstance that the Zadokites are reckoned in 40⁴⁶ among the *bēnē lewī*. But is this in any way surprising? Whatever rank the Zadokites held, they belonged in any case to the 'sons of Levi.' The legal definition of their *rank* did not do away with their *descent*. Thus, too, is the circumstance explained that the Zadokites are reckoned also in 43¹⁹ and 44¹⁵ (see above) among the members of the tribe of Levi.

A passage to which van Hoonacker recurs more than once (pp. 194, 196) is 48¹¹. There we read, 'The priests that are sanctified of the house of Zadok, who kept My charge; who went not astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the *lewijjīm* went astray,' etc. *Firstly*, it is possible that here the term *lewijjīm* means 'the members of the tribe of Levi in general,' i.e. the *lewijjīm* who did not belong to the species of the Zadokites, this subdivision of the tribe of Levi. The majority of the members of the tribe might be designated by the general term, because no special term had been coined as a name for this major part. That this was the meaning of the word *lewijjīm* here could be inferred from the previous occurrence of the opposed term 'sons of Zadok,' for the reader was aware that the Zadokites too were amongst those that belonged to the tribe of Levi. *Secondly*, the genealogical expression, 'sons of Zadok,' would naturally lead to the taking of *ha-lewijjīm* also in the genealogical sense. *Thirdly*, 44¹⁰⁻¹⁴ presents an obstacle to our regarding the expression *ha-lewijjīm* as a description of the legal standing of the parties in question. For this passage announces that the *lewijjīm* who had shared in the idolatry of Israel are to suffer degradation. They must have still enjoyed the right of כָּהֵן (44^{13a}), else it would

not have been announced that, as a punishment for their sin, this function was to be taken from them. For these reasons we are not to hold, with van Hoonacker (p. 196), that 48¹¹, whose rendering is given above, contains 'a terminology consecrated by an already established tradition.' But let us assume that in 48¹¹ there is a trace of the transition whereby the expression *ha-lewijjīm* lost its genealogical sense and became the title of a particular order. Might not the way for this transition have been paved by king Josiah's reformation (2 K 23^{8f.}), which received its sanction through the prophetic pronouncement of Ezk 44⁷⁻¹⁵? Finally, would it not be in harmony with 44⁷⁻¹⁵ if the expression *ha-lewijjīm* in 48¹¹ is, so to speak, on the point of passing from a genealogical term to an official designation?

The importance which the reformation undertaken by Josiah (2 K 23^{8f.}) possesses for the explanation of the passages with which we are concerned in Ezekiel, does not appear to have been at all adequately appreciated by van Hoonacker. What may be the reason of this? Well, he supposes that Ezekiel in his vision may have transformed the actual conditions of his time (p. 197). 'One sees with what liberty the prophet, in order to give a real embodiment to his visions, utilizes the elements supplied to him by history' (*ib.*). Now, the *future* standing of the 'prince' may be a new creation of Ezekiel's (45¹⁷ 46^{2ff.}). But, as regards the punishment of a portion of the tribe of Levi (44⁷⁻¹⁵), he must have taken account of the law as it existed in his own day, otherwise his words would have had neither basis nor meaning. Such a basis is absolutely indispensable for the penalty announced in 44¹⁰⁻¹⁴, and it cannot be destroyed by pointing out the hyperbolic character of predictions uttered by Ezekiel in the course of chaps. 40-48. Van Hoonacker, indeed, refers again to 'the purifying stream' (p. 197), whose beneficent influence is described in 47¹⁻¹². But the perspective of prophecy is often very ideal, and yet this does not do away with the reality of the historical features to which regard is had in any particular section of a prophecy. How, for instance, could anyone conceive of the prophet Nahum having threatened the conquest of Nineveh (Nah 2⁹), after Nineveh had been already conquered? Hence, we repeat, it is absolutely necessary that the persons spoken of in Ezk 44¹⁰⁻¹⁴ had still the right to offer priestly services to

Jahweh at the time when it was announced to them that, as a punishment for their transgression (v. 12^b), they must give up this function (v. 13^a).

Again, van Hoonacker thinks he can prove the priority of the so-called Priests' Code (p. 199). He remarks, for instance, that 'in his description of the temple (chaps. 40-42) the prophet mentions a number of arrangements without stating their purpose. It is incomprehensible that this detailed plan should have been elaborated and put forward unless its author and those to whom he addresses himself were acquainted with an equally detailed ritual with which the temple described might correspond.' It is unnecessary to offer uncompromising opposition to this. I myself, in my *Einleitung in d. A.T.*, p. 228 ff., have urged that the stratum of the Pentateuch which I have called the 'esoteric-priestly' (P) did not spring in a single moment from the brain of an author as Minerva from the head of Zeus. But the words of van Hoonacker just quoted do not establish the possibility that the legislative enactments contained in P as to the relations of priests and Levites are prior in time to Ezk 44⁷⁻¹⁵. For according to P, one portion of the members of the tribe of Levi had the right absolutely denied them of approaching the altar and the other apparatus of the sanctuary (Nu 3^{32ff.} 4^{27. 28. 33}). If this had been the publicly recognized rule as early as the time of Ezekiel, 44⁷⁻¹⁵ could not have been written, for the prohibition to exercise the priestly office, addressed to a portion of the members of the tribe of Levi, could not then have been spoken of as a punishment inflicted upon this portion.—The actual course of things was the reverse of what van Hoonacker supposes. The doom pronounced by the prophet on one portion of the tribe of Levi represents a stage in the development of the legal position of the tribe of Levi as this appears in P. So also, rightly, R. Kraetzschmar in the *Hdkomm.* 'Ezekiel,' 1900, p. 283.

Van Hoonacker objects that, if this theory of the development of things be correct, P would have given a different account of the different portions of the tribe of Levi than what it actually contains. He thinks it would have said nothing about the two lines, the Eleazarites and the Ithamarites, but would have named only Zadok as the ancestral head of the priests. But this does not appear to me to be the right starting-point for judging the

so-called Priests' Code. Rather may we say that the latter brings together old and new traditions. In this garden the old trees were not rooted up when new shoots sprang up from and beside their roots. Nay, is it not the 'father of history' who thus states the principle on which he worked: 'Ἐγὼ δὲ ὀφείλω λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα, πείθεσθαι γὰρ μὲν ὧν [= αὐτῶν] οὐ παντάπασιν ὀφείλω (Herod. vii. 152), i.e. 'I feel myself bound to relate what is related to me, although I do not feel bound to believe it all.' I have recently met with a similar statement in Lucian (*De Syria dea*, § 11), and quite a peculiar interest attaches to the words of A. Wiedemann (*Die Toten und ihre Reiche im Glauben der alten Aegypter*, 1900, p. 9) regarding the Egyptians: 'Everything which forefathers believed was preserved in the most real sense, along with all that later generations had added, without people troubling themselves about the different currents of thought which consequently ran side by side in the Egyptian literature.'

Van Hoonacker also finds it a stumbling-block (p. 205) that the members of the tribe of Levi, who are in future to hold the priestly office, are called in Ezk 44¹⁵ Zadokites, whereas, according to 1 Ch 24^{3ff.}, the priests consist of descendants of Zadok and descendants of Ithamar. He has not noted, however, that sixteen of the twenty-four priestly classes were composed of Zadokites, whereas the Ithamarites made up only eight classes. Is it an impossible supposition that the priests were named after the majority who naturally stood in the forefront? Besides, Ezekiel's announcement regarding the Zadokites may have been modified by the subsequent history. For the degradation *by law* of a portion of the tribe of Levi remained all the same, and this degradation was the main point in 44⁷⁻¹⁵. Moreover, the meaning of a prophetic utterance cannot be made to depend upon whether it was effectual or not (cf. Jer 18⁷⁻¹⁰, etc.).

I am compelled, then, to conclude that Professor van Hoonacker has failed, like others, to vindicate the old conception of the history of the legal relations of priests and Levites. If, on the other hand, any one desires to see how thoroughly the newer view of this history is in harmony with the O.T. statements about the place and the times of worship, he may turn to my *Einleitung in d. A.T.*, pp. 175 ff., 217 f., 232 ff.