Zeitschrift: Revue internationale de théologie = Internationale theologische Zeitschrift = International theological review

Band: 13 (1905)

Heft: 50

Artikel: Recent old testament criticism

Autor: Lias, J.J.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-403618

RECENT OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

I have been asked by the Editor of the *International Theological Review* to give a brief account of the present position and results of Old Testament Criticism. It will be impossibly to do so intelligibly without some account, however imperfect, of the way in which things have come into their present condition. As far back as the twelfth century it was seen that the Pentateuch as it stands could not all have been written in the time of Moses, and five centuries later some writers began to deny that he could have been the author. In 1753 Astruc, a French physician, came to the conclusion that Genesis was a collection of documents, and that their principal portions could be identified by the use in them of the names Jehovah and Elohim respectively for God. In 1783 Eichhorn translated Astruc's work into German, and carried Astruc's theory a little farther. The Jehovistic and Elohistic sections, he declared, might be further identified by the use, on the part of their writers, of certain characteristic words and phrases, as well as by the "doublets", as they are now called, found in the narrative. Eichhorn, however, regarded the Pentateuch as a production of the Mosaic period, and pointed to the corroboration of its statements in the subsequent history. In 1798 Möller's "fragmentary hypothesis" was made public, and was supported by Dr Geddes, a Roman Catholic, in England, and by Vater and Hartmann in Germany. Vater is remarkable for having anticipated the theory which is now popular among scholars, that much of the Pentateuch was written about the time of the Captivity. The "fragmentary hypothesis" regarded the various portions of the Pentateuch as a number of disjointed fragments loosely strung together. It speedily gave way to the "supplementary" theory, which postulated an original writing, or *Grundschrift,* containing an abstract of the history, and supposed that other authors, the Jehovist

especially, supplemented its details with further information. The well known commentator De Wette was the originator of this theory, in which he was followed by many critics of ability and ingenuity, who, however, differed considerably in their views of the date and authorship of the various parts of the books. Ewald, a distinguished Hebrew scholar, occupied an independent position of his own, and embodied his theory in his "History of Israel". It was elaborate, and for a time held the field almost entirely, in England at least, among the advocates of reconstruction. It divided the Pentateuch into (1) some ancient fragments, (2) a "Book of Origins", written about the time of David, (3) a number of later prophetic narratives, compiled by an editor, and (4) Deuteronomy, which was the work of the final compiler, and appeared about the reign of Manasseh. The supplementary theory, however, it was soon found, demanded reconstruction. The "Grundschrift", consisting of the Elohistic portions of the Pentateuch, did not answer to the bald and formal character one would expect in an ancient abstract of history, such as it was supposed to be. Consequently Hupfeld undertook, with wonderful industry and ingenuity, to detach the later from the earlier portions of the Elohistic narrative in Genesis. He succeeded in extracting from the materials before him a narrative of the required rudimentary character, which he assigned to the First Elohist, and the remainder of the *Grundschrift*, which he assigned to the Second Elohist, was regarded as a parallel narrative to that of the Jehovist, and of about the same date. But in spite of the favour with which this theory was received, it was ultimately found to be untenable. Consequently Graf, accepting Hupfeld's dissection of the Elohistic portions of the Pentateuch into two parts, reversed their respective dates, and his novel theory, accepted with eagerness by Kuenen and Wellhausen, was popularized by them in works which have had a wide circulation and have for the first time been accepted not only by a large number of scholars, but by a considerable portion of the general public. This theory regards the supposed *Grundschrift*, not as the earliest, but as the latest narrative of the series, and represents it as being the work of an exilic or post-exilic writer who desired to recommend his monotheistic theories, and his elaborate details of symbolic worship, to the Jewish people during, or after their return from

the Captivity. Thus the latest form assumed by the analytic criticism which owes its origin to Astruc requires us to accept, though not altogether without modifications, (1) a Jehovistic writer of the eighth or ninth century B. C., a native of Judæa; (2) an Elohistic writer of about the same date, who dwelt in Northern Israel; (3) the Deuteronomist, whose book was composed during the reign of Manasseh; and (4) the work of the author of the Priestly Code, to whom the original *Grundschrift* in Genesis, as well as the whole of Leviticus, and large portions of Exodus and Numbers, are now assigned. The Priestly Code was supposed by Wellhausen, Kuenen, and Robertson Smith, to have been written during the Exile, and the whole Pentateuch as we now have it was, as they declared, in the hands of Ezra, the four component parts of it having been subjected to a revision by an editor before the return from Captivity, and excerpts from them having been embodied in a volume which was accepted by the exiles as a true account of Israelite history, religious and secular.

These views are no longer, as has already been intimated, propounded to us without modifications. Thus Deuteronomy is now said to be a *compilation* by, not the *composition* of, its author. And the date is less clearly defined than it was by the authorities just mentioned. The reigns of Hezekiah and even recently of Ahaz, have been mentioned by scholars who have embraced the theory of Wellhausen, as probable dates for the compilation. Also, as Möller—not the Möller mentioned above—has shown[1]), the later writers of the Wellhausen school deny what Wellhausen and Robertson Smith asserted[2]), that the Law read in the ears of the Jewish people by Ezra was the whole Pentateuch as it stands. What Ezra read, they tell us, was not the Pentateuch, but the Priestly Code. And this was combined with the other histories by a still later hand. The date of the present Pentateuch is therefore now fixed at a period considerably later than the return from the Captivity. This, as Professor James Robertson has pointed out, amounts to the acceptance of a set of critical Canons quite different to those of Wellhausen[3]), and he further remarks that

---

[1]) Möller, *"Are the Critics Right?"*, pp. 59—64.
[2]) Wellhausen declared that there could be "no doubt" of this.
[3]) *Early Religion of Israel.* Preface, p. X.

König, in his statement of his position, has not failed to "accentuate" his "difference" from the leader of his school. It may be added that Professor Driver, the leader of the English critics of the Wellhausen type, has attached a higher historical value to the statements of the Pentateuch as it stands, e. g. in the matter of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and has declined to commit himself to the theory of the gradual evolution of religion in Judah from animism and fetichism, through polytheism, to an ethic monotheism, which was a cardinal point with the original authors of the theory. Further slight modifications of the Graf-Wellhausen theory are also found in the writings of its English supporters.

Thus Kuenen declares emphatically that Ezekiel was the real author of the Jewish Law contained in the Pentateuch in its final shape, and therefore described him as the "Father of Judaism". But the English critics of his school now regard the Priestly Code, on which they confess the Jewish religious system to be founded, as a "codification of pre-existing Temple usage". Moreover, Professor Driver, of Oxford, confesses reluctantly that, though he believes the earlier narrative in the Pentateuch to be a compilation from the works of two authors, a Jehovist and an Elohist, they have been so completely fused together by the compiler that it is impossible to be absolutely certain that they were originally separate.

Meanwhile the effort at discrimination by the analytic criticism of sources has been industriously carried on. What Hupfeld did for Genesis has been done by other authors for Exodus and Numbers. Leviticus, though assigned to two or more authors by some critics, is regarded as belonging entirely to the period when the so-called Priestly Code was elaborated. Wellhausen and others have devoted themselves with great industry and much acuteness to the task of indicating the various sources to which the respective portions of the books belong, and claim to have reached their results with such completeness that they can divide a single verse into two, or even three separate fragments without risk of error. Criticism may therefore henceforth be reckoned as one of the most exact of sciences, able to reach its conclusions without leaving room for the possibility of mistake. These results have been popularized by "Rainbow" and "Polychrome" Bibles, but these, however much satisfaction they may

have given to scholars, have been received by the general public with some suspicion and a good deal of perplexity. But the results attained, or supposed to have been attained in the way of analysis must be taken as a whole, or given up altogether. For the whole structure is of so fragile a nature that the slightest disturbance of its component parts would bring the whole fabric to the ground. This will be clear when we consider that if even a single passage assigned by the school of Wellhausen to the writer of the Priestly Code should prove to have been the work of the Elohist or the Jehovist, a portion of the analysis would have to be constructed afresh on the new basis which had been perforce arrived at.

The criticism which is for the present accepted by the majority of scholars has had yet a further task before it. The historical statements of the Pentateuch find strong support in the remaining historical books. Thus the book of Joshua, as it stands, most obviously presupposes the book of Deuteronomy—in fact the whole Pentateuch in its present shape. The book of Joshua, therefore, must have been one of the histories compiled or composed by the various authors whose works were combined into the Pentateuch by the final editor. Thus instead of the Pentateuch critics now speak of the Hexateuch, and the six first books of the Bible, as we now have them, are now discovered to have been the work of the post-exilic reviser of Jewish history. The history in book of Judges had next to be subjected to revision at the hands of "the Deuteronomic compiler", or "editor", or "redactor", as one of the prominent critics of the Wellhausen school has called him. The work of this writer was re-edited, with excerpts from some other volumes, many of them of an earlier date. At what time this final edition was published we do not precisely know. But that the Deuteronomic editor revised the history to suit his own views, or as it is put, "set" the history or histories before him "in a new framework, embodying his theory of the history of the period" is supposed to be certain. The books of Samuel have been subjected to a similar process, though the work of the Deuteronomic reviser or editor is less strongly marked in them than in Judges. Once more, no period has as yet been fixed for the compilation of the various histories into the books of Samuel as they now stand in the

Canon. In the books of Kings the Deuteronomic element is regarded as more conspicuous, especially in the portion of them which relates to the building and hallowing of Solomon's Temple. In these books we are able to reach more exact information about the compiler. He was "a man like-minded with Jeremiah", and "almost certainly" a contemporary of his. And he "judges men and things", by the "standard" of Deuteronomy. As for the remaining books, they are admittedly post-exilic. But the critics of the school of Wellhausen assign them to a later date than had been usual before that school originated.

It will be seen that a great deal requires to be done before the rewriting of the history necessary on the assumption of the correctness of the results attained by the Wellhausen school can be regarded as complete. It claims to have discovered that the earliest known authorities for the Hebrew history are two unknown writers who lived between 900 and 750 B. C. But by the admission that these two writers have been fused together at a later period, so that the special portions belonging to each cannot be always satisfactorily distinguished, as well as by another admission which has been made that the later Elohist—the author, that is of the Priestly Code—becomes a Jehovist after Exod. VI, the original basis on which the investigation proceeded—that is Astruc's theory—has been abandoned. That theory, as has already been said, regarded the use of the words Elohim and Jehovah as the distinctive marks of authorship. Then the admissions that Deuteronomy is a compilation, not a composition, and the Priestly Code a codification of pre-existing materials, not the invention of the exilic period, open up a fresh vista of questions which as yet have not even been approached, as to the nature of these compilations, the distinction between their earlier and later portions and the ground for that distinction, as well as other questions concerning the dates of the authorities from which the compilation was made. Nothing, again, has as yet been done towards the discovery of the earlier sources from which J. and E. (the Jehovist and the Elohist) obtained their materials. Such sources there must have been, because the Jehovistic and Elohistic histories are confessedly not entirely independent of each other, and their common matter must have had a common origin. What that common origin was, documentary or traditional; if documen-

tary, what was the character of the documents, and how they disappeared; if traditional, what is the value of that tradition, are points on which, at present, we have no information. Neither it is quite clear as yet why the publication of the histories of Israel should have taken place between the reigns of Ahab and Hoshea in Israel, and of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah in Judah, and not earlier, especially when there seems reason to believe that the reigns of David and Solomon were times of vast national progress, and that in them an immense political, social, and intellectual advance took place. As we know from the history of other countries, as well as of my own, great writers have usually arisen in great epochs.

Were any histories, the historical critic will naturally ask, composed in the reigns of the great monarchs just mentioned, as in the time of Augustus and his successors at Rome? And if so, why have they disappeared? Then, again, the Wellhausen school is more or less committed to the idea that the religion of Israel was originally scarcely distinguishable from that of the other nations of Palestine. But no endeavour has as yet been made to trace the steps of its development, nor to point out what were the precise religious conditions in the reigns of David, of Solomon, of Jehoshaphat, of Joash, or of Hezekiah. The Jehovistic and Elohistic histories were in existence, no doubt, in the reign of the latter monarch. But we do not know whether he had access to them. As regards the North Israelite document we need especial evidence of the fact that it was or could have been known to him. Nor, supposing that they were in the hands of himself and his adviser Isaiah, is it at present ascertained what authority was at that time attached to their contents. The answer to this question is rendered more difficult by the fact that only twenty-four of the sixty-six chapters attributed to Isaiah are supposed to have been written by him. These problems, as well as other difficult ones regarding the steps by which, and the circumstances under which, the genuine history of Israel was supplanted by the Deuteronomist *rifacciamenti*, must be settled before Hebrew history can be said to be established on a critical basis. At present no approaches have been made to their solution.

On the other hand a school has arisen, in Germany and England alike, which approaches the problem of Hebrew history,

not on the subjective, but on the objective side. It rests upon the discoveries made by archæological investigation. The inscriptions on the Assyrian and other monuments have been published, and Hilprecht, Sayce, Hommel, and other students of the Assyrian, the Sumerian, and other ancient languages, have drawn conclusions from them. These conclusions do not by any means uniformly confirm those of the analytic and subjective school. Indeed the archæologists are very often in direct conflict with the disciples of Wellhausen. The question is as yet unsettled, but it may at least be said that the discoveries which have of late been made tend rather to confirm than to impugn the correctness of Hebrew history as it has been handed down to us. Meanwhile a number of critics, in Germany and England alike, are more or less out of sympathy with the school of Wellhausen. Dillmann, for instance, whose learning, diligence, and fairness are not disputed, and who, "though he be dead, yet speaketh", believes the Priestly Code to be earlier than Deuteronomy, although he does not think that it had been published when Deuteronomy appeared. Other names in Germany are those of König, Kittel, Klostermann, Bredenkamp, Strack, and von Orelli. A list of these scholars will be found in Möller's "Are the Critics Right?", a work which has lately been translated into English. In England Professor Margoliouth, of Oxford, a distinguished Oriental scholar, and Dr Redpath, Grinfield Lecturer in the Septuagint at the same University, have declared themselves in favour of the general correctness of the traditional view of Hebrew history. And a formidable attack upon the Wellhausen position has just been made by Thomas, in a small volume entitled the *Organic Unity of the Pentateuch*. Another work called *Studies in Biblical Law* has also appeared, in opposition to the Graf-Wellhausen theory. It is written by H. M. Wiener, a Jewish barrister at Lincoln's Inn. I have heard of yet another volume, by Dr Hoffmann, the head of the Jewish seminary at Berlin, which also, as I understand, defends the traditional view. It is certainly premature as yet to consider the victory of Wellhausen and his disciples as finally secured.

Note. — Since the above was written, Dr Kennett, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, has started a theory that,

as Ezechiel knows nothing of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy must have been post-exilic. It could not, therefore, have been the book discovered in the Temple in the reign of Josiah. That book might either have been the J. Code, or the book of the prophet Micah. Thus the Wellhausen theory, as modified by Driver, is completely abandoned, the Pentateuch is once more thrown into the critical crucible, and we must wait and see what comes out.

J. J. Lias.