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THE TURN OF THE TIDE IN PENTATEUCHAL CRITICISM

IT is surely one of the most remarkable facts of our time, that Pentateuchal criticism, of which the French physician Jean Astruc¹ had laid the foundations nearly two centuries ago, and, after a long period of laborious scientific effort by a considerable number of scholars, of which the famous German critic Julius Wellhausen² had formed the definite shape, the glory and pride of Old Testament scholarship—regarded as the most certain and unshakable result of scientific research—has nowadays come again into a state of serious crisis, wherein hardly anything from what formerly seemed an ascertained fact is not abandoned to the most vigorous doubts. These doubts have not merely been raised by those who might be denoted as “traditionalists,” but also by the most radical critics.

This turn in Pentateuchal criticism, which I have been pointing out in various publications both in the Dutch and English languages,³ can be dated from the beginning of the twentieth century.

We discover the first symptom of alteration in opinion with the appearance of Gunkel's *Die Sagen der Genesis*.⁴ Although he confesses himself an adherent of the current documentary theory, of which he exultingly exclaims: “An admirable amount of zeal, of sagacity, of genial power of conception, has been spent on this labour, and a work has resulted, of which posterity may be proud,”⁵ yet the application of his saga-theory is in fact a dissolution of the Wellhausen-hypothesis. In considering each of the supposed component parts of Genesis as a compilation of

¹ In 1753, with the publication of his *Conjectures sur les memoires originaux, dont il paroît que Moÿse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Génèse*. He was the first to draw attention to the fact of the different usage of the names for God: Yahweh and Elohim, which since has been the clue to the literary analysis of the Pentateuch.

² Cf. his *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*. The first edition appeared in 1878 as *Geschichte Israels*; in later editions the title was altered.

³ e.g. *De Wellhausensche Pentateuchtheorie en de Tekstkritiek*, Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift, XIV, pp. 121-131; *De strijd om den Pentateuch*, *ibid*, XV, pp. 4-17; *Toets over bronnscheiding in den Pentateuch*, Amsterdam, 1916, pp. 5-16; *De-kentering in de Oud-Testamentische Wetenschap*, Kampen, 1920, pp. 16, 17; *The Wellhausen Theory of the Pentateuch and Textual Criticism*, Bibliotheca Sacra, 1914, pp. 393-405.

⁴ Göttingen, 1901.

⁵ *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*. Göttingen, 1910, Introd., p. lxxxii.

sagas, originally handed down by oral tradition, and afterwards fixed in writing, he necessarily obliterates the peculiar characteristics of the separate documents, and imperils the whole documentary analysis.

Quite a similar effect is produced by the metrical studies of Sievers.¹ He, just like Gunkel, sticks to the documentary theory, but the results of his researches can only refute the adopted analysis. By application of his metrical scheme he succeeds in dividing the supposed documents J, E and P into five, three and six various sources respectively. But, as we pay attention to these different texts, we observe that more than one of them show the same metre: three of these by Sievers distinguished types of metre are found in J, E and P alike, and one in J and P together. So it is manifest that the metrical analysis and the documentary analysis cross each other, and the analysis of Genesis on the metrical principles of Sievers would necessarily lead to a quite different definition of sources than the Wellhausen theory.

On the shoulders of Gunkel stands Eerdmans,² the successor of Kuenen in the chair of Old Testament exegesis in the University of Leiden. Eerdmans, who has written in German,³ sees into the consequences of Gunkel's saga-theory and does not hesitate to accept them. In the preface of his first publication on the subject he frankly declares: "With this essay on the composition of Genesis I withdraw from the critical school, Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen, and oppose the so-called documentary theory in general." What particularly caused him to do so was, as he informs us, the discovery of the fact, that in many of the sagas of Genesis a polytheistic background is shining through, a fact that was obscured by the documentary analysis, as it violated the unity of the story. Moreover, he is convinced that likewise in numerous legal regulations can be found traces of lower religious conceptions which compel him to assume a considerably older age for the Israelitic laws, than is admitted by the current Pentateuchal criticism. Consequently he returns to the ancient sequence: first the Law and then the Prophets, which order had been totally subverted.

¹ *Die Hebräische Genesis, Metrische Studien II* (Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Klasse der Kön. Sächs. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, XXIII), Leipzig, 1904-5.

² As is said by W. Eichrodt, *Die Quellen der Genesis von neuem untersucht*, Giessen, 1916, p. 151.

³ *Alttestamentliche Studien I, Die Komposition der Genesis*, Giessen, 1908; II, *Die Vorgeschichte Israels*, *ibid.*, 1908; III, *Das Buch Exodus*, *ibid.*, 1910; IV, *Das Buch Leviticus*, *ibid.*, 1912. No further volumes have been issued.

The ideas of Eerdmans generally have not met with agreement on the part of Old Testament scholars. Yet it cannot be denied that his vigorous assault on the current hypothesis has seriously injured it, and in more than one point has led to revision of existent opinions, even to the abandoning of taken positions. It is significant in this respect, that nobody less than Smend finds himself under necessity to give up the *אלה תולדות* (*elēh tholedoth*) as characteristic of the Priestly Code, and ascribes this expression to some glossator.¹ Eichrodt has joined him in this conclusion.²

Things look still more serious for the documentary theory in the case of textual criticism. This has rooted up the foundation on which, since Astruc, the whole Pentateuchal analysis had been based: the criterion of the different usages of the names for God: *Yabweh* and *Elohim*. Scholars had always started from the Massoretic text. Textual criticism, however, has shown, that with regard to the divine names, this text is not to be relied upon. For it appears that the number of variants in the use of these names is exceedingly great, especially in the Greek version. In Genesis alone the Septuagint has no less than forty-nine variants, and in the first four books of the Pentateuch together 180. In September, 1909, Professor Schlögl, of Vienna, in the *Expository Times* published the results of his investigation with reference to Gen. i. 1-Ex. iii. 12. He tells us that in this part of the Pentateuch the name *Yabweh* is found 148 times in the Massoretic text. In no less than 118 places, however, there are variants, either *Elohim* or *Yabweh Elohim*. Likewise the name *Elohim* appears 179 times in the Massoretic text. Other texts have fifty-nine times *Yabweh*, forty-seven times *Yabweh Elohim*. The combination *Yabweh Elohim* is found twenty times in the Massoretic text. Of these only one passage has no variants.³ It is quite clear that with this state of affairs the criterion of the names for God is of absolutely no value, and then the documentary theory, which rests on this criterion, is no longer to be maintained.

The first to point out this very important matter was the German scholar August Klostermann. As early as 1893 he objected to the use of the names for God as a criterion for the

¹ *Die Erzählung des Hexateuch auf ihre Quellen untersucht*, Berlin 1912, pp. 14-16.

² *op. cit.*, pp. 20-23.

³ *Expository Times*, vol. XX, p. 563.

separation of documents, basing his opinion on the statement that it would not do to consider the Massoretic text identical with the authentic text. The prime fault of Pentateuchal criticism was its naïve belief in the "veritas Hebraica."¹ He was, however, left alone till about 1903. Then all of a sudden several scholars simultaneously and independently raised the same objection to the current Pentateuchal criticism; in Germany, Lepsius² and Dahse,³ and in England Redpath⁴ and Wiener.⁵ Of these it is particularly Wiener and Dahse, to whom has to be ascribed the merit of having pushed forward the argument. Wiener, who recently lost his life through the Arabian riots in Jerusalem, never got tired of harping on the same string;⁶ and Dahse, having given himself with sacrificing devotion to the time-consuming and monotonous labour of the comparison of texts and manuscripts, in 1912 issued an important volume, *Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage*,⁷ which made a profound impression in the circles of Old Testament scholarship. Eerdmans also stood in with them and in controverting the documentary theory laid due stress on the textual argument.⁸

The force of this argument could not reasonably be denied. One of the first to give way to it was the attractive and influential professor of Old Testament Theology in Rostock, Justus Köberle,⁹ He immediately felt the necessity of extending the investigation concerning the divine names to the other historical books of the Old Testament, but was, alas! prevented from instituting this inquiry by his premature death.¹⁰ Others followed, e.g., Troelstra,¹¹

¹ *Der Pentateuch*, Leipzig, 1893, pp. 1-54.

² *Reich Christi*, pp. 20ff, 168ff.

³ *Textkritische Bedenken gegen den Ausgangspunkt der heutigen Pentateuchkritik*, in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 1903, pp. 305ff.

⁴ *A new theory as to the use of the divine names in the Pentateuch*, *American Journal of Theology*, 1904, pp. 286ff.

⁵ In various articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1908 and 1909.

⁶ Reprints from *Bibliotheca Sacra* appeared under the titles *Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism*, London, 1910, and *Pentateuchal Studies*, London, 1912. He also edited a booklet, *The Origin of the Pentateuch*, London, 1910.

⁷ Giessen, 1912.

⁸ Cf. *Die Komposition der Genesis*, p. 34f.

⁹ *Zum Kampf ums Alte Testament*, 1906, p. 26.

¹⁰ The investigation has been undertaken for the books of Samuel by Caspari, and published, with an introduction from the papers of Köberle, in *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1910, pp. 378ff.

¹¹ *De naam Gods in den Pentateuch*, 1912. Translated into English and issued by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge: *The Name of God in the Pentateuch*.

van Ravesteyn¹ and de Groot² in Holland, and Löhr³ in Germany. And again others, who were not at once convinced of the failure of the documentary theory, at least readily admitted the gravity of the objection raised, such as Kittel,⁴ Gressmann,⁵ and Sellin.⁶ The alarm for the security of the adopted theory, which was roused in the circles of its adherents, was expressed in a peculiar way by the Rev. A. P. Cox, who in the *Expository Times* of 1909, referring to an article of Wiener's, asked whether anybody could refer him to a work or an article in which the question touched by Wiener was discussed from the point of view of those who accepted the documentary hypothesis.⁷ Principal Skinner, in answering the perturbed vicar, "does not happen to know a single work which deals exhaustively with the subject from the critical standpoint,"⁸ and this was written while he was himself "assuring his readers that the existence of the variants in the names of God was not first discovered by Wiener, but was the common property of Old Testament investigators."⁹ This was surely a remarkable confession. The critics know very well that the divine names are variable elements of the text, but nevertheless they do not at all reckon with this fact and build a very radical theory concerning the origin of the Pentateuch on the variation in the use of these names in the Massoretic text. For the rest, Skinner endeavours to fill up the gap by a detailed discussion of the matter in the *Expositor* for 1913,¹⁰ afterwards published in book form under the title *The Divine Names in Genesis*.¹¹ Of still greater significance is the fact that the great Wellhausen himself has admitted that the textual criticism had touched the weak point of his celebrated hypothesis. Dahse, after the disturbing appearance of Eerdmans' *Komposition der*

¹ In an explanation of Jer. vi. 16, in the periodical *Theologische Studien*, 1914.

² In being graduated as D.D., 27th June, 1913, he defended the thesis: The variation of the names Yahweh and Elohim in the Old Testament does not produce a reliable criterion for documentary analysis. Dr. de Groot is now professor of Semitic Literature in the University of Groningen.

³ *Die Geisteswissenschaften*, 1913, p. 266.

⁴ In the second edition of the first volume of his wellknown *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, p. 255f.

⁵ *Mose und seine Zeit*, 1913, p. 368.

⁶ In an article *Geben wir einer Umwälzung auf dem Gebiet der Pentateuchkritik entgegen?* in *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1913, p. 119ff.

⁷ p. 378.

⁸ *loc. cit.*

⁹ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Eighth Series, vol. V, pp. 289-313, 400-420, 494-514: vol. VI, pp. 23-45, 266-288.

¹¹ *London*, 1914.

Genesis, wrote to Wellhausen referring to his article in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* for 1903, and asking his opinion. Wellhausen's answer, which he allowed Dahse to publish in 1912, is contained the above-mentioned declaration.¹ No wonder then that the faculty of Theology at the University of Leipzig in 1911 instituted the following prize subject: "The grounds for the variety of the divine names Yahweh and Elohim in many books of the Old Testament require a renewed investigation; the faculty demands such." The answer of the student Friedrich Baumgärtel, now professor in Greifswald, to whom the first prize was awarded, has—it is a great pity—not been printed.

It would certainly be utterly unjust not to mention in this article the name of the German pastor, Wilhelm Möller. This indefatigable combatant was formerly a convinced adherent of the Wellhausen theory. He assures us that it was only after intense resistance, yielding reluctantly to the force of historical arguments, that he withdrew from the Wellhausen construction, which he had till then esteemed irrefutable.² As early as 1899 he published his first book: *Historisch-kritischen Bedenken gegen die Graf-Wellhausensche Hypothese*, wherein he demonstrates the untenability of the results acclaimed by the critics. This book was translated into English and issued under the title, *Are the critics right?* in 1903. It was followed by a series of publications, which minutely and convincingly point out the errors of the current Pentateuchal criticism.³

An extraordinarily heavy blow was inflicted upon the documentary theory in recent years by the manner in which the problem of Deuteronomy anew came up for discussion. Among the critics it used to be held as a fixed axiom, that the date of Deuteronomy, in or about the days of King Josiah, was the Archimedian point for the description of the evolution of Israel's legislation.⁴ It was not considered scholarly to cast even the shadow of a doubt on the following theses: that there was a legitimate plurality of sanctuaries in Israel till the time of King Josiah; that during the reign of this king for the first time the

¹ Cf. Dahse, *Wie erklärt sich der gegenwärtige Zustand der Genesis?* Giessen, 1913, p. 6.

² *Wider den Bann der Quellenscheidung*, Gütersloh, 1912, p. 10.

³ *Entwicklung der alttestamentlichen Gottesidee in vorexilischer Zeit, Historisch-kritische Bedenken gegen moderne Auffassungen*, Gütersloh, 1903; *Wider den Bann der Quellenscheidung*, *ibid.*, 1912; *Geschichte und Prophetismus Lütgenburg*, 1925: *Rückbeziehungen des 5. Buches Moses auf die vier ersten Bücher*, *ibid.*, 1925.

⁴ Cf. e.g., Kittel, *Die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, p. 91.

sacrificial service was restricted to the temple of Jerusalem ; that the Deuteronomic law was wholly dominated by the tendency of condemning the plurality of sanctuaries and limiting the cult to one single sanctuary, and that therefore this law could have originated in no other period of Israel's history than in or about the reign of Josiah. The historical narrative of the discovered old law-code in his days by the priest Hilkiah (2 Kings xxii. 8ff) was interpreted as the actual evidence of this concatenation of theses.

But all this has recently been called in question. In the year 1911, Rev. J. S. Griffiths, just like Möller, a former adherent of the modern Pentateuchal criticism, ventured to defend the opinion that the book of Deuteronomy could not possibly originate in the time of Josiah. He instanced several cases of a philological and archæological character, that decidedly excluded its rise in the Josianic age. Hardly any law peculiar to the Deuteronomic code can be regarded as bearing upon the time and the circumstances of this age.¹ One of the points touched by Wiener also was that there is no essential difference respecting the places of sacrificial service between the pre-Josianic practice and the provisions of Deuteronomy. He discriminates between local lay-altars, e.g. those meant in Ex. xx. 24-26, at which private lay-worship was allowed, and the one priestly altar in the Temple of Jerusalem, to which statutory sacrifices had to be brought.² In the year 1919 a volume was issued by Martin Kegel in Germany, dealing with the so-called reformation of Josiah, in which important booklet the current theory concerning Deuteronomy was subjected to a thorough and minute criticism, which proved that theory wrong in every particular.³ So, he argues strongly for the absolute reliability and correctness of the historical narrative : there is no question about any forgery, the book was not made up, but really found, and bearing the marks of good old age so convincingly that no person, not even of those who were injured most by Josiah's reformation, dared to suggest any doubt as to its genuineness. Moreover, he contradicts the assertion of the critics that the reformation has its primary purpose in

¹ *The Problem of Deuteronomy*, London, 1911.

² *Vid. Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism*, pp. 193-197; and *A Vital New Element in Old Testament Criticism*, in the Dutch periodical, *Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 1918, pp. 164-169.

³ *Die Kultus-Reformation des Josia. Die Aussagen der modernen Kritik über II Reg. 22.23 kritisch beleuchtet*, Leipzig, 1919. I gave an ample review in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, vol XXI, pp. 353-367, 406-417.

limiting sacrificial service to one single sanctuary, the Temple of Jerusalem ; not the concentration of the cult, but the cleansing of the cult occupies the primary place, the idea of concentration is only secondary ; and certainly both measures cannot have aimed at something which was absolutely new, but must have been founded on the consciousness of a claim having been valid for Israel of old. The book itself is regarded by him as considerably more voluminous than the Deuteronomic code, yea as the whole of the at that moment extant written Mosaic Torah, which had been lost for some time. Of peculiar importance was the publication by Theodor Oestreicher in 1923 of his *Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz*. He wholly disconnects the reformation of Josiah and the Deuteronomic code, and energetically oppugns the statement of the critics that the Deuteronomic law is dominated by the tendency of limiting the cult to one single sanctuary. He immediately received the powerful support of the renowned and authoritative German Old Testament scholar, Willy Staerk, who, in the next year published an essay in which he threw the full weight of his scholarship into the scale against the theorem of Pentateuchal criticism, that Deuteronomy should have been the promoting code of concentration on behalf of the public worship.¹ At the same time the professor of Hebrew in New College, Edinburgh, Adam C. Welch, joined the ranks of the opponents, and offered his solution of the Deuteronomic problem by dating it in the time of Samuel.² Kegel also joined again in the discussion and declared : on the point on which Wiener and Oestreicher concur, we must approve their opinion without restriction ; in Deuteronomy there is no question of absolute concentration of public worship.³

On the other side the pretended axiom of the date of Deuteronomy was disputed by Gustav Hölscher, who in the most vigorous manner denies the possibility of explaining the Deuteronomic code from the conditions and circumstances of Josiah's days.⁴ Especially does he argue that the laws of Deuteronomy—assuming that they were destined for the time of Josiah—must

¹ *Das Problem des Deuteronomiums. Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Pentateuchkritik*, Gütersloh, 1924.

² *The Code of Deuteronomy. A new theory of its origin*, London, 1924.

³ Cf. two articles entitled *Wo opferte Israel seinem Gott?* *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1924, pp. 239-280, 483-516.

⁴ *Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion*, Giessen, 1922, pp. 130-134, and more extensive in *Komposition und Ursprung des Deuteronomiums*, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. XI (1922), pp. 161-255.

have raised all kinds of practical difficulties against their observance; the requirements of this code plainly were not feasible, e.g., the drastic provisions against idolatry. And he concludes that the Deuteronomic code cannot have originated at an earlier date than after the return from the Babylonian exile. It may seem very strange that Hölscher does not take into consideration the possibility of the Deuteronomic code preceding Josiah's age; but at any rate his arguments clearly show how far nowadays the date of Deuteronomy is from being one of the unshakable columns whereon the Wellhausen construction of Israel's legislation can rest.

In addition to all this the past year has brought us the surprise of an extensive study from the pen of an Egyptologist by profession, A. S. Yahuda, from Heidelberg, who opens quite new prospects for Pentateuchal investigation. Starting from the supposition that, if the Biblical data concerning the beginning of Israel's history and its early relation to Egypt are right, there must be distinct vestiges of Egyptian influence upon the Hebrew language, he has subjected the Pentateuch to a broad and minute examination, of which he presents the results in a first volume, bearing witness that Egypt did exercise influence upon the Pentateuchal language and phraseology to a very large extent.¹ Previously, others had been pointing to the same fact, e.g. Naville² and Kyle³; but Yahuda has instituted his inquiry on a broader base, and more systematically. He expresses himself very cautiously, but at any rate he takes full responsibility for the thesis, that the language of the Pentateuch must have originated in an Egyptian milieu, and *eo ipso*, that this can only have taken place at the time when Israel was sojourning in Egypt. But there is more to be expected of which Yahuda promises us to deliver proof in a second volume; in the latter part of the Pentateuch, especially in the book of Deuteronomy, a new element joins the Egyptian, and this new element displays a plenitude of linguistic peculiarities, which unmistakably point to such peoples and tribes as occupied the peninsula of Sinai and the 'Araba close to the Jordan; and whereas these peculiarities are found only in the

¹ *Die Sprache des Pentateuch in ihren Beziehungen zum Aegyptischen. Erstes Buch.* Berlin-Leipzig, 1929. In March, 1921, he subjected his first results to the British Academy of London under the title *New Light on the Language and Thought of the Pentateuch*.

² *Archæology of the Old Testament*, London, 1913.

³ *Moses and the Monuments* (Stone Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary for 1919), Oberlin, Ohio, 1920.

latter part of the Pentateuch, and neither in its former portion nor in other Biblical books, there is sufficient evidence that the Pentateuch must have been written about the time it refers to itself.

I make bold to say that the evidence given above fully justifies the statement, that the tide of scholarly opinion as to the Pentateuch is on the turn.

Of course, this by no means signifies that Old Testament scholarship is being converted to the belief in the divinity of the Bible and of the *Thorah* in particular. Many of the scholars, who oppose the current Pentateuchal criticism, proceed much farther in destructive manipulation of the Holy Writ than even Wellhausen. Nevertheless, this movement on their part is of immense importance. Whereas, formerly, in the opinion of scholars it used to be regarded as an ascertained fact, that Pentateuchal criticism as applied by Wellhausen and others, was indubitably right, so that no scholar could venture to give expression to any doubt on the matter, but at the risk of his scholarly reputation, now at any rate it is recognised that Pentateuchal criticism is not quite as certain as was imagined, and that it is not at all unscientific to call it in question. Now then, if one has a perfect right to doubt the current criticism when the method is that of those who subject the Holy Scripture to a still more destructive criticism, it surely cannot be out of order to doubt the methods and results of this destructive criticism when that is done by believers in the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture, persons who humbly bow to its authority. At any rate it would be unreasonable to suggest that Pentateuchal criticism should be deemed uncertain, only on condition that it should be replaced by a still more radical criticism, and that all of a sudden the method of Wellhausen should become certain as soon as anyone wished to take a more conservative position.

Scholarship has achieved much for which we should be profoundly grateful. But we cannot be content with this. What we want is a truly scientific treatment of the Holy Scripture, of the Pentateuch in particular, which duly acknowledges the truth of the Bible. How we would welcome the co-operation of the whole learned world in this respect! But we fear this is not to be expected; the division of men according to their belief and unbelief holds good also in the scientific world. But certainly we think a good deal has been gained, when our believing

scientific research can no longer be waived aside with a single gesture as contrary to the ascertained results of scholarship—for these results are no longer certain. With that our believing scientific investigation finds the way free : it can put itself forward in the learned world with as much right as any other current of scholarship ; the monopoly of Wellhausenism is broken, and the free competition of scholarly workers is re-established.

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