

CHAPTER TEN PRIESTS AND LEVITES

Our next point of inquiry concerns the priests and Levites, and their relation to each other. Critics claim that in no point is the development more clearly traceable step by step than here. By a gradual restriction, the priestly office became the exclusive prerogative of the so-called sons of Aaron. Ezek. 44:6-11 describes the degradation of the great mass of Levites from priests to temple-servants, and is the bridge between Deuteronomy, which recognizes all Levites as priests, and uses the two terms interchangeably, on the one hand, and the Priest Code on the other hand, where only the Sons of Aaron are allowed to appear before Jahveh. According to 1 Kings 2:27, 35, Abiathar was removed by Solomon from the priesthood for political reasons, and replaced by Zadok, whose descendants from that time onward seem to have monopolized the temple-service. As Deuteronomy shows, in the days of King Josiah the Levites could still claim an equal right to this service. The distinction between the sons of Zadok and the other Levites was not one of rank, but simply of actual service. Accordingly we find them in juxtaposition in statements like the following: צדוק וכל־הלוים (Zadok and all the Levites), 2 Sam 15:24 (Graf, p. 48). Only within the circle of the sons of Zadok themselves, Graf admits that there may have been a certain gradation in rank, from the lowest temple-servant upward to the כהן הגדול or כהן הראש (*high priest*), 2 Kings 12:11, 22:4, 8; Jer. 20:1. With the centralization of Deuteronomy, the seed for the future distinction of rank was sown. The Levitical priests of the province, separated from their altars, could no longer remain priests. Deuteronomy still puts them on a par with the sons of Zadok; but the latter had long ceased to consider them as equals, and now began to question their rights altogether. This was the actual state of affairs, which Ezekiel tries to present in a moral light. He reproves the idolatrous ministering of the Levites as priests at the Bamoth; and, in punishment for this iniquity, they are degraded to temple-servants. Thus they shall atone for what was most abominable in the prophet's estimation, and henceforward the Levites exist as an order distinct from the priests. Notwithstanding this moral semblance, it is clear that Ezekiel's retributive justice was of a peculiar retrogressive kind: he proclaims as a punishment what had long ago been the real situation, and was after all but a natural consequence of the centralization. What the prophet did, was to settle the controversy between Levites and Zadokites in favor of the latter. He did not claim for the house of Zadok, Aaronic descent, because in his days it was well known that the old line had ceased during the reign of Solomon. Not until after the exile, when the thread of tradition had been lost, could the Priest Code present this claim, and the chronicler establish it by a series of artificial genealogies.

We have accordingly in this development the following stages –

1. Jehovistic Code. No mention of priests. Young men offer sacrifices (Exod. 24:3-8). A priestly order, but no priestly family.
2. Deuteronomy recognizes a hereditary *clerus* consisting of numerous families with exclusive and indisputable privileges. Also the name "Levitical priests" appears. The principle of heredity, though afterwards carried back into the Mosaic age, actually dates from the later times of the kingdom, and was entirely Judaic in origin.
3. Ezekiel legalizes the distinction between the priestly family connected with the temple and the

families before connected with the Bamoth. This distinction had long been valid as a matter of fact; viz., ever since the Bamoth were destroyed. Now, however, it is clothed with divine authority.

4. What Ezekiel saw it necessary to justify as a divinely authenticated innovation, the Priest Code finds it possible to proclaim as an “eternal statute.” Reminiscences of opposition appear in the history of Korah’s rebellion (compare also Num. 17:10, 18:23). Here we have the regular gradation in descending order: Aaron as high-priest, his sons as priests, his tribe as Levites, constitute a systematic hierarchy. In pre-exilic history and literature, an imposing figure like that of the high-priest was wholly unknown. The priesthood was rather a royal dependency. But in the Priest Code the high-priest is sovereign, the top of the pyramid of Israel’s congregation reaching into heaven, and unto Jahveh himself. A theocratic king beside him is unthinkable. That the head of the cultus is at the same time head of the nation, points us to a time when the nation was robbed of its secular independence, and had nothing left but its ecclesiastical organization. Israel has become a congregation, **עדה**. Dependence on foreign power is the necessary prerequisite for the origin of a hierarchy. Hence the Priest Code must be post-exilic.

In commenting upon this ingenious theory, it will be necessary more than once to cast a side-glance at the historical arguments by which it is fortified. Our remarks are the following:—

1. It is positively untrue that the Jehovistic law knows nothing of a priestly order. That it is only occasionally alluded to, and not repeatedly mentioned, cannot awake suspicion: for (a) it did not exist when the Covenant-law was promulgated; (b) the purpose of this law was not to regulate the ritual system, but simply to furnish a basis on which it could be constructed. On the other hand, that incidental allusions and prospective remarks should be made in reference to the subject can be expected. The following passages, which are Jehovistic, fully warrant us in saying that the Covenant-law is not contradictory to, but rather preparatory for, the more full Levitical legislation (Exod. 4:14, 19:22, 32:1, 29, 33:7-11). Wellhausen rules out such passages from the list of arguments by mere capricious remarks like the following “Exod. 32:29 stands on the basis of Deuteronomy,” and “Exod. 19:22 can hardly (?) have belonged to the original Jehovistic sources” (Prolegomena, 2d ed., p. 146).

2. It is inaccurate, also, to say that Deuteronomy puts the priests and Levites on a par. No argument for this can be drawn from the absence of a strongly marked and everywhere emphasized distinction. As we hope to show hereafter, this absence is wholly in accordance with the general character of the book. Moreover, Deuteronomy does not aim to give complete or precisely formulated directions, but only compact popular restatements of matters minutely regulated elsewhere. That the author speaks of Levites in general in not a few passages, where, more accurately expressed, the priests are meant, must be explained on the rule, that the genus may be used to designate the species, where there is no danger of ambiguity. The same inaccuracy occurs in the historical books (compare Josh. 3:3, 8:33, 13:14, 18:7; 1 Sam. 2:27; 2 Chron. 5:5, 30:27): even Malachi, who wrote after the pretended promulgation of the Priest Code, speaks in the same manner (2:4). The priests were Levites in reality. Is it not natural that in the middle books of the Pentateuch, in laws enacted while yet Aaron and his sons occupied the priestly office, the priests should have been designated by the familiar term “sons of Aaron” and that afterwards, when both Aaron and two of his sons had died, in a book of prophetic character, the more general term “Levitical priests” should have been chosen, denoting “those Levites who shall be priests at any time of the future”? The lack of definiteness in Deuteronomy, where it

employs these terms, cannot be construed as proving entire ignorance of the distinction. The passage (Deut. 18:1) is instructive in this respect. Graf and other critics hold that “Levites” stands here in apposition to “priests,” and the expression “all the tribe of Levi” to “priests (and) Levites.” On this critical presupposition we have three terms to express that which each of them separately would have expressed with sufficient clearness, so that at least two are superfluous. Under these circumstances we are certainly justified in taking an alternative, and considering the construction as an *asyndeton*: “The Levitical priests (and) the whole tribe of Levi,” which is in full accordance with the context. In ver. 5, if the priesthood of the whole tribe was presupposed, we would naturally expect “him (the priest) and his brethren for ever.” The phrase “him and his sons” strikes us as more suitable to a hereditary priesthood within a single family, than to the existence of a priestly tribe.

Other instances of this generic designation of the priests occur in the Old Testament, even in books written after the exile, which cannot but have known the distinction between Levites and priests (Ezra 10:5; Neh. 10:28, 38, 11:20).

But, we are told, Deuteronomy allows the Levites “to stand before the LORD,” עמד לפני יהוה; “minister to the LORD,” שרת בשם יהוה (את יהוה); “bless in the name of the LORD,” יהוה ברכך בשם; all these being in the Priest Code the exclusive prerogatives of the Aaronic priests.

These expressions occur in five passages (10:8, 17:12, 18:5, 7, 21:5). In two, however, the functions referred to are predicated of the priests, no mention being made of Levites viz., 17:12 and 21:5. We have only to examine the remaining ones, 10:8, 18:5, 7. It is a remarkable fact, that in those very books, which, according to the critics, have reconstructed the history, and thus are beyond suspicion of non-conformity to the Levitical law, — that in those very books, we say, the identical expressions are applied to the Levites. How absurd it would be to infer from 2 Chron. 29:4, 5, 11, 12, where the Levites are addressed by Hezekiah as “standing before the LORD, and serving and ministering unto him,” that the author of Chronicles did not distinguish between priests and Levites (compare also 2 Chron. 23:6). Why shall we make the expression to prove in Deuteronomy what it cannot prove with any possibility in Chronicles? If Deuteronomy be written before the Priest Code, then Chronicles also.

We need not deny that these phrases originally indicated a function peculiar to the priesthood, especially in the case of עמד לפני יהוה (*stand before Jehovah*). But it is equally plain, that they gradually assumed a looser and wider signification, which made them alike applicable to the work of both priests and Levites. The name for all service at the sanctuary was taken *a potiori* from its most honorable and important part in which the priests officiated. This fully accounts for their exclusive use in the middle books with reference to the priests, and for their modified sense in subsequent literature.

All that remains of the argument, is that in 10:8 the phrase “to bless in his name” is without any specification applied to the whole tribe of Levi. There are no other instances in which this same construction, ברכך with the preposition ב, is used, when others than priests are spoken of. Still, this is far from admitting that the verse under consideration teaches the equality of priests and Levites. The best exegesis seems to be, to take the whole verse as predicated in general of the whole tribe of Levi. Of the duties enumerated, part belonged to the Levites and priests in common, as, “to stand

before the LORD,” “to minister unto him”; part to the Levites especially, as the bearing of the ark; part to the priests alone, as “to bless in the LORD’s name.” All this was so perfectly self-evident, that no specification was needed.

3. Ezekiel’s Thora is for the modern critics what his *δοξ μοι που στω* was for Archimedes. With their interpretation of it and the inferences drawn therefrom, the whole structure of their historical theories stands or falls. At first blush, the point would seem to have been very badly chosen for historical argumentation. The whole section is of a highly ideal character, and was written in a time when, from historic reality, the cultus had become already a distant dream, and the prophetic idealization could accordingly be given free play. It is needless to point out in detail how many features in these chapters will not admit a historical or literal interpretation, and never received one even at the hand of the most obstinate literalist. It has been reserved for the higher criticism to handle and utilize this unwieldy material in the most sober and practical way.

In the face of their ideal, prospective character, the critics have been bold enough to make these chapters speak for the past, forgetting that the threads of historical tradition had been freely interwoven with those of bold forecast of the future, so as to form a prophetic mantle. We must remember that this is a vision, and in it Ezekiel sees only higher spiritual realities through the medium of an ever-changing and ever-growing symbolism. Though the latter had, of course, its points of contact with the present and the past, it could not be limited by them the essentially new truth, which the prophet revealed, required also new and modified forms, in which to clothe itself. It is from this point of view, that the critics should have estimated the historical significance and value of what they are accustomed to style “Ezekiel’s program.”

But let us grant, that there is at least a background of historical truth in the statements of Ezek. 44: 5-16, with which we have here specially to deal. Do they bear out the critical theory of a degradation of some Levitical priests to temple-servants as the first origin of the legal distinction between priests and Levites?

The answer to this question can only be obtained from a careful and fair examination of the passage itself. Ezekiel makes three statements: the first contains an accusation, the second an announcement of punishment, the third confirms a privilege. 1. Uncircumcised persons have been used for menial employments in the temple. 2. Certain Levites have committed idolatry, and in punishment are henceforward to perform the same menial service, formerly done by the uncircumcised. 3. Certain Levitical priests, specified as the sons of Zadok, who have remained faithful when the others apostatized, are honored with the exclusive privilege of officiating before the Lord.

Our first remark is, that there must be more than an incidental connection in the prophet’s mind between his first and second statement. It is unnatural to suppose that both are mentioned together, simply because the removal of the uncircumcised made a return of the Levites necessary, or because the punishment of the latter required the removal of the former, or finally because by a play of history both gave the prophet an occasion for ingenious combination. A more than superficial reading of the passage will convince us, that there is a deeper, more causal, connection. That the apostate Levites have to occupy the place of the uncircumcised, is for no other reason than because by their apostasy they had made the employment of the latter possible. They abandoned what was their specific duty,

— viz., the ministering unto the priest in the temple, — sinned themselves, and became the cause of the defilement of the sanctuary. Hence a double penalty is inflicted 1. The destruction of their self-chosen places of worship; 2. The restitution of what had been abstracted from the sanctuary, by their becoming again temple-servants.

We regard it as settled by this interpretation, that Ezekiel does more than spread a moral mantle over historical facts. His words imply that the facts themselves had a moral quality. The Levites who served at the Bamoth had not always been there, but willfully left their original position at the only legal sanctuary.

The prophet does not further specify who these Levites were. That he calls them Levites (ver. 10) decides nothing, since his terms are not derived from their former position, but already from the future degradation he imposes. Neither does the fact that their destiny to officiate as temple-servants is considered as a punishment, prove, on the other hand, that they held a higher position at the sanctuary before. The only thing that can be said about it, is that they were Levites whether exclusively non-Aaronic, or partly Aaronic, is not stated. It is highly probable, however, that both priests and Levites, in the more strict sense of the term, were found amongst them.

The critical allegation, that they consisted of nothing else than Bamoth-priests out of occupation, rests on the arbitrary assumption, that the sons of Zadok are honored, not for their exceptional faithfulness to Jehovah, but on account of their extraordinary position. They were the priestly family for centuries in charge of the temple-worship. Hence, the critics infer, Ezekiel's approval of their attachment to Jehovah can but mean a prophetic sanction of the temple as the only legal sanctuary, and at the same time a side-attack upon all other places of worship. In other words, the sons of Zadok were not examples of a rare attachment to Jehovah, but the favored incumbents of a highly lucrative office. It was not a question of right and wrong, but of facts. If all this be true, if they were not only the original and highest, but also the exclusive, officers of the temple, our position, that the Levites now condemned to perform menial service, had once shared this privilege with the sons of Zadok, cannot be maintained. If the one party is approved simply for officiating at the temple, then the other was condemned simply for officiating at the Bamoth; and other moral considerations cannot have influenced the degradation of the latter.

The answer to the question, "For what special reason did the sons of Zadok deserve praise?" will decide every thing. *A priori* it seems improbable that the prophet should bestow upon them such a eulogy simply because they did not leave their comfortable position at the chief sanctuary of the land. It needed no great amount of self-abnegation and pious adherence to Jehovah, to make them stay where they were. But why may not their faithfulness have manifested itself in quite another way? We know from history, that the temple itself had been more than once the central seat of apostasy. Urijah was the instrument of the idolatrous lusts of King Ahaz; and, when Manasseh defiled the temple, no opposition on the part of the priests is so much as heard of. That such abominations were not uncommon, even after Josiah's reform, the prophet's vision in chap. 8 sufficiently shows. Hence there is all reasonable ground to assume that the merit of the sons of Zadok consisted in something more than a matter-of-fact serving in the Jerusalem temple. They evidently had remained faithful when others, occupying the same or similar privileges with them, had gone astray. And, instead of an objection, we may find in this high praise, with which their conduct is extolled, a confirmation of

our view that others had abandoned that same trust, which they had so faithfully and piously kept.

This explains how Ezekiel with the Priest Code and all before him could still make a degradation out of that which the critics have declared to be explicable only on their suppositions. The whole solution lies in the fact, that Perhaps many of the apostates had been priests in the temple before. They had left the central sanctuary, and sought the Bamoth. In the reform of Josiah they lost their position. Now, in this ideal vision, Ezekiel describes their degradation from priests, which they had once been lawfully, and afterwards illegally, to Levites.

But is not this an objection to our view, that certainly the majority of these priests of the Bamoth must have been originally Levites? How in their case will the punishment apply? Can the restoration to a previous state after apostasy be called a penalty for the latter? In rashly answering these questions in the negative, the critics have found a tempting occasion to display their sarcasm. Dr. Kuenen asks, "How can common citizens be threatened with the penalty that henceforward they shall have no seat and vote in a council of noblemen?" But what if these citizens had either legally or illegally possessed for a considerable time this right of vote and session? When they were afterwards deprived of these in punishment of their intrusion, could anybody take exception to such a penalty? The case is not different here. The Levites had probably left the temple, aspiring to a higher position; viz., that of priests. As such they had officiated at the Bamoth. When these are destroyed, their punishment is made to consist in the disgraceful and humiliating re-entrance upon functions which in self-exalting pride they had left. What is there inappropriate in all this?

Still, it will be said that the deposed priests must have gladly accepted the most humble charge, and that so, after all, the punishment was turned into a favor, and failed to reach its end. History, however, testifies to the contrary. At the first return from the captivity under Zerubbabel and Joshua, forty-two hundred and eighty-nine priests, and only three hundred and forty-one Levites, joined the expedition. At the second, under Ezra, only thirty-eight Levites were with much trouble collected. This shows how even a long exile had not extinguished the priestly pride in those who could no longer claim a higher rank than that of Levitical servants. When they preferred captivity to this humiliation, how can it be doubted that they considered it as a punishment from the outset, and that accordingly Ezekiel was justified in representing it as such?

So much in positive explanation of Ezekiel's statements. We do not claim to have relieved all difficulties, but may console ourselves with the thought, that even what remains dark and mysterious, stands out in a far more credible form than the absurdities to which the critical theory necessarily leads. We notice the following points: —

1. At the time of the first return from exile under Zerubbabel and Joshua, the distinction of rank between priests and Levites was so firmly established that nobody questioned its validity any longer. The whole population of Jerusalem consisted, according to 1 Chron. 9, of Israel, priests, and Levites, לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, כֹּהֲנִים, לְוִיִּם. On this all critics agree. But, on the critical supposition, this universal recognition of the Aaronic prerogative is a most astonishing fact. Before the exile a violent opposition was continually carried on by the provincial priests against the Zadokites at Jerusalem. No doubt, the Bamoth priests argued that the sons of Zadok possessed their exclusive rights, not *de jure*, but *de facto*. They once occupied the place, and it was impossible to expel them. This opposition

continued during the first part of the exile. With the abolition of the temple-service, the Zadokites lost their only stronghold; viz., the actual occupancy of the office. From that time onward they were no more than the other Levites, like them deprived of their sanctuary. Instead of there being reason for the opposition to subside, and for the superiority of the sons of Zadok to gain silent recognition, all things seemed to work in the other direction. And still, a few verses of the prophet Ezekiel, in a never-realized vision, were sufficient to conjure the strife, and make out of the proud Bamoth priests, humble Levites and temple-servants! Who would believe, that from all the features in Ezekiel's vision, to which the returning exiles attached no importance, this single one was excepted, and that the slighted Levites meekly suffered the exception to their own degradation?

2. Among those who returned, there were far more priests than Levites. In the first expedition, the proportion was twelve to one. With Ezra, only thirty-eight Levites returned. How will this agree with the theory that Ezra was the writer of the Priest Code? Surely the proportion between Levites and priests there assumes a totally different character, and cannot be explained out of the actual state of affairs, immediately after the exile. Wellhausen assumes that the priesthood in Jerusalem was as numerous as that of the Bamoth. He concludes from the genealogies of the chronicler, that the proportion must have been changed in conformity with the statements of the Priest Code. This change was effected by Levitizing strange families of Nethinim, singers and janizaries. But that the Zadokites were as numerous as all the Bamoth priests together, is highly improbable; for in Ezekiel they appear as a small exception in contrast with an apostate majority. Then the assumption that non-Levitical families were Levitized rests on no historical basis whatever. And finally the critics must not only account for the proportion in Chronicles, but for that in the Priest Code itself.

3. It is arbitrary to assume that only this part of Ezekiel's Thora had binding force, and that all other parts were utterly disregarded. If the degradation of priests to Levites was so persistently adhered to, it becomes incomprehensible how afterwards a conscientious man like Ezra could substitute a legal fiction for a divinely authorized prophecy, of which he admitted, in part at least, the obligatory character.

4. It cannot be properly called a gradual restriction, when Ezekiel limits the priesthood to the sons of Zadok, and the Priest Code confines it to the wider circle of Aaron's descendants. Thus, the Priest Code would not only have carried out one part of Ezekiel's statements, and disregarded others, but in the same matter accepted one element, and rejected the others. On Ezekiel's authority, it continues to keep down the Levites still, it goes back on the prophet's limitations, and widens the circle of favorite priests. The sons of Aaron are substituted for those of Zadok. This is no restriction, but relaxation: God's words are made of no effect. Doubtless, there had been Aaronites among the Bamoth priests. That they were afterwards re-admitted into the priesthood, *we* can understand when we recognize the ideal character of Ezekiel's prophecy; but the critics can by no means do so, who make it the basis of historical argumentation.

All this shows in what difficulties the critical theories involve us, so far as their so-called Deuteronomic period and the subsequent time are concerned. But when we go back to the pre-Deuteronomic times, the difficulties are not less numerous, and the precarious methods by which critics remove them not less obvious. We can only point out the weakest spots of the theory here, without laying claim to an exhaustive treatment of the subject.

1. The theory fails to explain how the tribe of Levi became the priestly tribe *par excellence*. A denial of this fact is impossible, since the historical testimony is too plain and unequivocal. Throughout the Old Testament, Levites appear clothed with priestly authority (Judg. 17-20, *passim*; 1 Sam. 6: 15; 2 Sam. 15:24; 1 Kings 8:4, 12:31). This will never agree with a theory that holds to the original universal right of all Israelites to officiate as priests. And, apart from this, the historical basis for such a distinction as we meet here is entirely wanting in the critical scheme. The only possible solution of the mystery of Levitism is that proposed by the Priest Code, which says that God separated the tribe of Levi from the other tribes for this purpose. The historical books, moreover, testify to this origin of the distinction, 1 Sam. 2:27, 28; Deut. 33:8-11 (a so-called independent North-Israelitish document). It is easy to see how a single family could gradually form itself into an hereditary priesthood; but when, in the time of the Judges, we find a whole tribe clothed with this prerogative, we look for something more than logical possibilities in explanation. Priestly tribes do not originate in such an incidental way. If Levi possessed the priesthood in the days of the Judges, he must have possessed it long before, and obtained it at a definite point of time; since the elements out of which a scheme of development might be constructed are entirely wanting. It seems absurd, in the face of this historical testimony, for critics to persistently deny any connection of this distinction with the facts that both Moses and Aaron were Levites, and with the momentous changes of the exodus. A historical explanation must be given here; and when one that is suitable, and accounts for all the facts, and is verified by history, presents itself, there is no ground for rejecting it. And finally, even apart from all this, the fact that from the earliest historic (according to the critics, even prehistoric) times, this distinction between Levites and non-Levites existed, is fatal to the whole hypothesis of gradual restriction. It proves, that in the history of the cultus, there was a stable and fixed element from the beginning, which, for this reason alone, cannot have arisen from unconscious development, but must have been based on intentional appointment.

It is amusing to see how the critics try to get around this fact. Wellhausen in particular makes two statements here, whose boldness, bordering upon temerity, is evidently only a cover for the weakness of his position on this important point. The first is, that no real connection whatever exists between the tribe of Levi (early dissolved into the neighboring tribes) and the priestly caste afterwards designated by that name. Both actually existed, but neither of them had any thing to do with the other. The tribe had long since disappeared when the caste rose into prominence. All this is based on a critical interpretation of Gen. 49:5-7, and clearly invented to escape the consequences which this, as we think unavoidable, combination involves. For the existence of Levi as a *priestly tribe* in the time of Judges, compare 17:7-9, 19:1, 18, and afterwards 1 Sam. 6:15, 2 Sam. 6:7.

Wellhausen's second statement is a conclusion drawn from a series of premises, which we quote from him in their logical order without any further comment, since they speak for themselves: –

- (1) Jonathan the Levite, who joined the Danites, was a descendant of Moses, according to Judg. 18: 30.
- (2) The priestly family at Shiloh stood also in genealogical connection with Moses (!), according to 1 Sam. 2:27.

(3) There is historic probability that the house of Eli descended from Phinehas, who was, in the early period of the Judges, priest of the ark.

(4) This Phinehas, according to Josh. 24:33 (Elohistic), was a son of Eleazar.

(5) Though tradition uniformly claims Eleazar for a son of Aaron, it has no right to speak in this matter.

(6) *Eleazar* does not differ in its orthography from *Eliezer*. And *Eliezer* was a brother of Gershom, a son of Moses.

(7) When we, therefore, read *Eliezer* instead of *Eleazar*, and disregard tradition, the following facts are established: (a) Jonathan the Levite descended from Moses; (b) The priestly house at Shiloh descended from Moses.

Conclusion: All that appears of an hereditary priesthood must be explained by descent from Moses. In his family the priestly office was perpetuated. The priests at Dan and Shiloh claimed Mosaic extraction for themselves. All priests considered Moses, if not as their genealogical ancestor, still as the institutor of their guild. In Judah the guild became a “gens.” Levite, at first the name of an office-bearer, now became a *nomen gentile*; and thus the Levitical priesthood originated.

2. Within the limits of the tribe of Levi itself, however, a distinction is traceable. First we have Deut. 33:8-11. The passage, as a whole, applies to the tribe of Levi (notice the transition to the plural number in ver. 9b and 10). In Moses and Aaron, Levi was proved, his fidelity tested by the Lord. But the very fact that these two were treated as representatives of the whole tribe, shows that they stood in a certain representative relation to it, not merely as leaders, but, in the case of Aaron, as the person in whom the priestly character culminated. To say the least, we have an allusion here to the peculiar position which the house of Aaron occupied in the tribe of Levi. The same representative capacity is ascribed to Aaron in the words 1 Sam. 2:27, 28.

The existence of an Aaronic priesthood is confirmed by abundant testimony, both for the beginning and the close of the period of Judges. The facts are these: (a) The tabernacle was in Shiloh (18:31); (b) It was called “the house of the LORD,” *par excellence*, excluding, at least legally, all others (19:18); (c) the ark of the covenant was at Bethel (20:27); (d) Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, “stood before it in those days.” Here we have one legal sanctuary in which only the descendants of Aaron have the right to perform the highest functions, “to stand before the ark.” The First Book of Samuel testifies to the same for the close of this period (1 Sam. 2:14, 22, 24, 30). Here the same indisputable facts appear, — one *universal* sanctuary served by an Aaronitic priesthood, which could only be deposed by direct divine interference, and accordingly must have been based likewise on direct divine appointment by Jehovah himself.

It has been claimed by Kuenen and others, that the passage, Deut. 33:8-11, implies the right of the whole tribe of Levi to the priestly prerogatives of bearing Urim and Thummim. But apart from the fact, that, in ver. 8, 9a the singular is used, and nothing prevents us from referring it to Aaron (or ideally to the high-priestly line descended from him), it involves no concession when we say that the

“holy one” is a personification of the whole tribe. For in this case we could simply understand the passage as describing the prerogatives of the tribe, without any specification which of them belonged to the priests exclusively, which to the Levites. If it could be said that the whole tribe of Levi was proved at Massah, and striven with at the waters of Meribah, whilst only Aaron and Moses are meant, it surely is not inconsistent to say that the whole tribe had the Urim and Thummim, though in reality only the high-priest could consult them.

The name “priests” occurs thirty-four times in the books of Samuel, sixty times in those of Kings, that of Levites twice in Samuel (1 Sam. 6:15, 2 Sam. 15:24), once in Kings (1 Kings 8:4). This preponderant use of the former shows already that both terms were not synonymous. That the two offices were distinct is evident from the last reference, 1 Kings 8:4, “the priests and the Levites,” **הכהנים והלוים**.

That specific priestly duties are not particularly emphasized is easily accounted for when we find that in none of the numerous passages where the name occurs, was there any occasion for it (see the statement in Curtiss’s “Levitical Priests,” p. 89). That Levites are mentioned as handling the ark (1 Sam. 6:15) does not prove that all Levites were priests. All we can infer, is that in Beth-shemesh there were “Levitical priests.” If the use of the general term “Levites” implies a denial of their descent from Aaron, we may just as well infer from the second half of the verse, that the “men of Beth-shemesh” who offered and sacrificed were not Levites. Beth-shemesh was a priestly city, so that the priests must have been present at this solemn occasion.

Of the alleged deviations in the *praxis* of that time from the Levitical law, we shall speak hereafter.

A few remarks concerning the high-priest may be added. The critical opinion, that such an imposing figure as his was entirely unknown before the exile, has been stated. We must now examine the arguments adduced to sustain this statement: —

1. Wellhausen asserts, that in no product of Old Testament literature prior to the Priest Code does the term high-priest appear as a standing designation of a peculiar office, and that persons to whom the title is given are in other places called simply **הַכֹּהֵן** (*the priest*). Only in the Priest Code and thereafter the use of the term becomes fixed in the traditional sense. At first blush, this fact might seem to corroborate the critical theory of a gradually originating hierarchy. When examined more closely, however, it loses all value, for the following reasons: —

(a) The term **כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל** (*high-priest*) appears as a synonym.

(b) The rare use of the name proves nothing, since it occurs only thrice in the Priest Code itself (Lev. 21:10, Num. 35:25, 28). In all other instances, the simple **הַכֹּהֵן** (*the priest*) is employed.

(c) The chronicler, who must have attached special importance to the name if the office was unprecedented in importance, and required historical justification, would certainly have used the term frequently. But the opposite is true. In most cases, he designates the high-priest with the simple **הַכֹּהֵן** (*the priest*). In Ezra, Joshua, the son of Jozadak, has no title at all. Neither is any found in the genealogy of the high-priests (Neh. 12:10, *seqq.*).

2. The second argument is, that no historical evidence of such an eminent position occupied by a single priest is found anywhere in the historical books. We answer, just as much there as in the Priest Code. When we leave the period of Judges out of the account, do we not find Eli, Ahijah, Ahimelech, Abiathar, Zadok, Jehoiada, Hilkiah, Azariah, all called absolutely **הַכֹּהֵן**, wearing the ephod, consulting the Urim and Thummim, evidently in great authority and of great influence with kings and people alike? What more can be demanded? If an explicit and accurate description of the high-priest's apparel and his work were given, how little would the critics hesitate to declare it a gloss or interpolation of later date? When assertions are made so strongly, and theories constructed so boldly, have we not the right to demand at least the evidence that somebody other than the high-priest officiated in the Holy of holies? All that can be adduced is 1 Sam. 3:3, where Samuel is said to have slept near the ark. The passage simply means that Samuel slept within the same precincts where the ark was.

Even Wellhausen's exaggeration of the plenipotentiary authority of the high-priest after the exile, as described in the Priest Code, does not entirely lack parallels in previous times. The example of Jehoiada and the important part acted by him in the revolution that placed Joash on the throne may be remembered here. That before the exile the sanctuary was a royal dependency, is only true with reference to the apostate idolatrous Northern kingdom. While Amaziah of Bethel speaks of a king's sanctuary, **מִקְדָּשׁ מֶלֶךְ**, the temple at Jerusalem is, without exception, called **מִקְדָּשׁ יְיָ**, the sanctuary of Jehovah; and the priests are always **כֹּהֲנֵי יְיָ**, the priests of Jehovah. Wellhausen himself admits that the Priest Code nowhere claims secular power for the high-priest. Still, in the next sentence, he does not hesitate to make the bold assertion, that beside him, no theocratic king is thinkable. If the former be true, we do not see how the latter can be maintained. Do not the historical books mention more than one instance where kings consulted their priests, and Urim and Thummim decided? And to the possibility of the coexistence of two powers, each relatively sovereign and absolute in its own sphere, the coexistence for centuries of prophetism and the kingdom abundantly testifies. The post-exilic high-priest is no more imposing figure beside Ezra and Nehemiah than Samuel beside Saul.

3. The third statement is that Deuteronomy knows nothing of a high-priest. That the blessing of Moses (33:8-11) teaches the contrary, we have already seen (compare also 17:12).