THE DEUTERONOMISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE FOUNDING OF THE MONARCHY IN I SAM. VIII

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The account of the introduction of a monarchy into Israel under Saul contained in I Sam. viii was ascribed by J. WELLHAUSEN 1) to the hand of the Deuteronomistic reviser of the Books of Samuel, whose narrative began in 1 Sam. vii 2 with an account of Samuel's victory over the Philistines, continued to 1 Sam. viii 22, and resumed in 1 Sam. x 17 ff. Into this an older account expressing a much more favourable attitude to the monarchy has been incorporated in 1 Sam. ix 1—x 26, which WELLHAUSEN linked with the narrative of the Ammonite war in 1 Sam. xi 1-15 2). However there now seems little doubt that this latter section represents a third tradition about the circumstances of Saul's becoming king, which is unquestionably historically the most reliable and informative, and which is also favourably disposed towards the kingship as an institution 3). The Deuteronomists' narrative is then further taken up in 1 Sam. xii where Samuel warns Israel of the dangers inherent in the monarchy, and affirms categorically that this institution will not, by itself, provide a guarantee of salvation 4).

Central features of WELLHAUSEN's observations and conclusions received widespread acknowledgement, and have been placed in a much wider perspective by M. NOTH's fuller recognition of the scope of the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr) extending from Deuter-

2) J. WELLHAUSEN, History of Israel, pp. 252 ff.
4) So especially 1 Sam. xii 15, 25.

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onomy to 2 Kings 1). The theocratic ideal expressed in 1 Sam. viii, and the assumption that this ideal may necessitate a very sharp criticism of the monarchy, represents a viewpoint of the Deuteronomists of the exilic age 2) who were able to consider the institution in retrospect. Even so there are numerous points of tension and apparent inconsistency in their attitude to the kingship since, alongside such criticisms, the promise of Yahweh to the dynasty of David (2 Sam. vii) could be regarded as a formative historical factor in Yahweh's relationship to Israel 3).

This ambivalent attitude is markedly reflected in 1 Sam. viii, which is the primary concern of the present study. It contains in vv. 11-17 a list of the "ways" of the king which presents him as a feudal tyrant, oppressive in the demands which he imposes upon his people, and whose behaviour will be such as to cause the people to groan under the impositions of his rule. This sketch of a royal tyrant contains some of the sharpest and most incisive criticisms of the institution of kingship which are to be found in the Old Testament. Furthermore it differs strikingly from the characteristic list of Deuteronomistic reasons for criticising individual kings. These are consistently formulated in more directly religious terms and concern disobedience to Yahweh's law, tolerance of the cults of Baal and Ashterroth and of following in the ways of Jeroboam ben Nebat 4). The particular socio-political reasons for hostility to monarchy presented in 1 Sam. viii 11-17 find their closest parallel in Jeremiah's attack upon Jehoiakim in Jer. xxii 13-17.

The major difficulty and cause of tension in the chapter is that the list of the ways of the king presents him in so extremely unfavourable a light that it is surprising to find that subsequently the Deuteronomists are prepared to affirm that Yahweh is willing to yield to Israel's

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2) In spite of NOTH (p. 110) the authorship of this history appears to me to be the work of a group rather than an individual.


4) Cf. 2 Kings xi 1 ff.; xii 26 ff.; xiii 33 ff.; xiv 15 ff.; xv 13, 30; xvi 31 ff.; 2 Kings xvii 15 ff.