

A Wave of Hypercriticism.

BY PROFESSOR W. C. VAN MANEN, D.D., LEIDEN.

III.

HAS Dr. Davidson walked in another and better path in the third edition of his *Introduction*? The latter is supposed to be revised and improved. We saw already how this honoured author would not leave unnoticed 'this wave of hypercriticism.' But in his separate treatment of the epistles scarcely anything is evident of this.

In 1 Co only these words: 'The authenticity of the First Epistle to the Corinthians has not been called in question except by Bruno Bauer and the Dutch writers Pierson and Loman' (vol. i. p. 46).

In 2 Co: 'The authenticity of the letter has not been questioned except by Bruno Bauer' (vol. i. p. 65).

In Gal: 'The authenticity of the Epistle has been admitted by all except Bruno Bauer, who imagines that it was compiled from those of the Romans and Corinthians; followed by the Dutch scholars Pierson and Loman' (vol. i. p. 88).

In Ro: 'The authenticity of the Epistle has been called in question by Evanson and Bruno Bauer' (vol. i. p. 117).

The other names which might be taken account of remain unmentioned, even that of Steck in Galatians, and so of course mine in Romans. Our arguments are not enumerated, and consequently not examined or met. The same remark indeed applies to the arguments of the oft-mentioned Bruno Bauer, Pierson, Loman, Evanson.

In seventeen of the twenty-one N.T. Epistles Dr. Davidson has spoken in more or less detail of the objections raised against their authenticity, as well as against Ro 15-16, and either approved or tried to refute them. He has not done this, however, with the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians. Nevertheless he could not apparently assent to the opinion of many people, that all demonstration of the authenticity of these must be looked upon as superfluous. He devotes in each instance a paragraph to the question, and thereby shows how much he was in earnest in his judgment rejecting Baur's arbitrary acceptance of four Epistles whose authenticity did not want research and on which that of the others de-

pended. That adverse judgment was expressed in the words: 'He (Baur) takes four Epistles, unquestionably authentic and forming a group by themselves, as the standard of measurement for groups of later and earlier origin' (vol. i. p. 20).

Of what does Dr. Davidson's demonstration of the authenticity of the leading epistles now consist in the pages bestowed upon it? He appeals almost exclusively to the old witnesses to prove the existence of the epistles. Beyond this no word in 1 Co. In 2 Co the assurance but no proof: 'It (the authenticity) is confirmed by the contents of the First (canonical) Epistle.' In Gal no further explanation than: 'The contents and style bear the apostle's stamp.' In Ro the words without a peg to hang on: 'The authenticity . . . is amply attested . . . by internal evidence' (p. 117), and 'The internal character of the epistle and its historical allusions coincide with the external evidence in proving it an authentic production of the apostle. It bears the marks of his vigorous mind, the language and style being remarkably characteristic' (p. 119).

This last sounds very well, if we only knew now how we could become acquainted with the apostle's 'vigorous mind,' so long as we do not know whether the transmitted epistles, of which we are to discover the authenticity, are actually his. If Dr. Davidson knows it he has omitted to tell us it. A 'remarkably characteristic language and style' may just as well have been the property of another as of the Apostle Paul. So long as we do not know whether we possess epistles from him we are not able to judge his language and style. Till we do know, it becomes us to be respectfully silent about the contents and style of a certain writing bearing 'the apostle's stamp.' Nothing is proved by reasoning in a circle except that he who resorts to it does not want proofs himself, because he does not doubt and keeps to that he had accepted without asking on what ground the hypothesis rests.

Have we more certainty in the external evidence? One would think so, when one observes the admirable calmness with which Dr. Davidson makes his most ancient witnesses speak one by

one in favour of the authenticity of the Epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans (vol. i. pp. 46, 47, 65, 66, 88-90, 117-119). Unfortunately the illusion disappears very soon when one hears the same learned man in the same work, speaking of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, which he does not attribute to Paul, declare: 'External evidence attests the letter's authenticity' (vol. i. p. 251). At the conclusion of the examination of the oldest witnesses in favour of the Epistle of James, which he supposes to be written about the year 90, he writes: 'Their evidence simply attests the existence of it when they wrote' (vol. i. p. 289).

In the First Epistle of Peter, supposed to originate from Rome 113 A.D., we find: 'The authenticity of the epistle is well attested by external testimonies both ancient and numerous' (vol. i. p. 538). Writing on the Pastoral Epistles, which must have originated between 120 and 125, he says: 'During that time (70-130 A.D.) they may have been written and accepted as Paul's without opposition, not only because the age was uncritical, but because they were thought useful and edifying letters with a Pauline stamp. The decision respecting their authenticity must turn upon internal evidence' (vol. ii. pp. 41, 42). After the examination of the witnesses for the Epistle to the Colossians, dated 125 A.D., we read: 'As far as external evidence goes, the authenticity of the Epistle is unanimously attested in ancient times. But the fathers of the second and third centuries were more alive to traditional beliefs than to critical investigations' (vol. ii. pp. 241, 242). In introducing the witnesses for the authenticity of the Epistle to the Ephesians, which we must consider written in the year 130 A.D., he writes: 'Antiquity is agreed in assigning the Epistle to Paul' (vol. ii. p. 272). In other words, the external evidence of the most ancient witnesses is of great importance when we are convinced of the authenticity and do not want proofs, but it has no significance as soon as we have reason to doubt the exactness of the tradition, or ask earnestly for proofs. Then it must be acknowledged, the ancients were not critical; they accepted what they liked, without asking for the origin of the writings which they read for their edification; their evidence does not reach further than the declaration that the works mentioned or quoted existed when they were writing.

Would it not be more sensible, in speaking of the authenticity of the 'Epistles' generally, to decline every appeal to the external evidence of the most ancient witnesses, to escape as critics the accusation of measuring with double measure or weighing with unequal weight?

At any rate, those who are outside cannot attribute value to an appeal to witnesses who are in turn approved and rejected, not on account of the kind and contents of their declarations, but because they are sometimes in accordance with what one expects and sometimes not. If, then, we observe that Dr. Davidson, in speaking of the authenticity of the leading Epistles separately, did not take into account other people's scruples, or render these superfluous by adducing convincing proofs of the authenticity, we cannot offer as excuse for him that he was perhaps not acquainted with the doubts that had been cast upon the authenticity. The above-quoted words, derived from vol. i. pp. 150-152 of his *Introduction*, prove the reverse of this. There, it is true, this learned man hides behind 'the best critics of Germany.' He says, however, seemingly independently, after having mentioned our names before: 'The arguments adduced against Paul's leading Epistles are for the most part arbitrary and extravagant, showing inability to estimate the true nature and value of evidence.'

The accusation is not a trifling one. Has Dr. Davidson tried to show its justice? No. Has he made an earnest effort to make himself familiar with the contents of the writings which he unhesitatingly pillories as a 'wave of hypercriticism' which 'it is needless to describe, or to show its futility,' 'devoid of interest for English theologians'?

Having consulted both the volumes carefully, I find no evidence of it in his *Introduction*. A letter kindly sent to me enables me to add that he had not had my study on the Epistle to the Romans under his eyes. This last must also have been the case with two other learned men called to instruct the English-speaking public with regard to 'this wave of hypercriticism'—Dr. W. Sanday and Rev. A. C. Headlam, the authors of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1895). They mention my book, *Paul II.: The Epistle to the Romans*, Leiden, 1891, as well as my magazine essays on Marcion's Epistle from

Paul to the Galatians (p. lxxxvii, note), and seem to derive from it, in the text, this impression, as unjust as comical, 'van Manen is distinguished . . . for basing his own theory of interpolations on a reconstruction of the Marcionite text, which he holds to be original.' Just as if I had not opposed these theories of interpolations at least as strongly as Sanday and Headlam, and had not done something quite different, in seeking to explain the origin of the Epistle to the Romans, than starting a new theory of interpolations. However, all that these learned authors say on the first three of the thirteen pages bestowed by them on a discussion of the integrity of the Epistle is an incomplete and faulty critical survey of what was written by Evanson, Bruno Bauer, Loman, Steck, Weisse, Pierson-Naber, Michelsen, Völter, and myself, either on the question of the authenticity or on the history and composition of the text of the canonical Epistle to the Romans. Now, as all this had to be said within two pages, it is really not to be wondered at that the criticism is introduced with the sigh: 'It has been somewhat tedious work enumerating these theories, which will seem probably to most readers hardly worth while repeating, so subjective and arbitrary is the whole criticism.' One must pity the authors who had to compose these pages as much as the readers who had to make themselves acquainted with their contents. Three pages are devoted to the description and treatment of the question of the authenticity, including the history of the criticism of the origin of the canonical text, against ten pages on the old question concerning chs. 15-16. And no further word about the authenticity of the Epistle in the whole work, in itself perfect in other respects. No word in the introduction, no word in the commentary. It is continually supposed, and without any vestige of proof accepted as certain, that the Pauline origin cannot and may not be doubted. All research relating to that is superfluous. Already the thought of it is 'a somewhat tedious work.'

Only complete ignorance on this point can make one speak of 'an interesting account' by Dr. Sanday and Mr. Headlam 'of the attempts recently made in Holland, as well as by one or two German scholars, to impugn the authenticity of the Epistle as a whole, or to show that it has been interpolated to a serious extent' (W. E.

Addis, *Inquirer*, Nov. 16, 1895). I suppose that the learned authors have not read, or even had in their hands, any or hardly any of the works of whose contents they speak (pp. lxxxvi, lxxxvii), except Evanson's *The Dissonance of the four generally received Evangelists*. Else it would, for instance, not have been possible for them to say of C. H. Weisse: 'His example has been followed with greater indiscreetness by Pierson and Naber (1886), Michelsen (1886), Voelter (1889-90), van Manen (1891).' Not one of the men mentioned has defended the 'style-criticism' of Weisse, and 'professed to be able to distinguish by the evidence of style the genuine from the interpolated portions of the Epistle.' Even Dr. E. Sulze, the most grateful pupil of the German professor, and the publisher of his *Beiträge*, 1867, did not defend it when he, in his criticism of Steck's 'Galaterbrief' (*Protest. Kirchenzeitung*, 1888, Nos. 41, 42), recommended the hypothesis that many objections to the authenticity of the leading Epistles could be explained by accepting 'Interpolationen und Ergänzungen' (interpolations and supplements). An opinion to which Steck, appreciating Sulze's good intentions, objected with reason (*Prot. Kirchenztg.*, 1889, No. 6).

In a note at the end of their rejection of the partly mentioned arguments alleged against the authenticity of the Epistle to the Romans, Sanday and Headlam add the following: 'The English reader will find a very full account of this Dutch school of critics in Knowling, *The Witness of the Epistles*, pp. 133-243. A very careful compilation of the results arrived at is given by Dr. Carl Clemen, *Die Einheitlichkeit der paulinischen Briefe*. To both these works we must express our obligations, and to them we must refer any who wish for further information.' Must we conclude from this that Knowling and Clemen have conducted them as guides through the lightly spoken of 'Dutch school of critics'? How could they know, then, that the first of the two had given 'a very full account,' and the other 'a very careful compilation of the results arrived at'?

Knowling's work is not known to me. Clemen did not occupy himself with the question of the authenticity. Others had done that already sufficiently in his opinion. 'Das war ja das nötigste, aber freilich auch das leichteste,' p. 4. (That was the most necessary thing, but also the easiest.) The more difficult task for which he

girded himself was to consist in considering all that belongs to the sphere of conjectural criticism, alleged interpolations, and supposed composition of Pauline Epistles from larger and smaller fragments, essays, and older epistles. He performed his task with talent to a considerable extent, but not faultlessly. One cannot leave unread the books used by him, if one does not want to receive many times an incomplete and faulty impression of what is said in them. For instance, he spoke constantly of a part of my criticism of Romans, namely, what I wrote about the composition of the Epistle, as if I wished to purge the canonical text from an endless number of interpolations. And this notwithstanding that he—unlike many others, especially German learned men—had understood my intention very well, judging from what he said about it (p. 73): 'We are not able to point out what has been added at different times, and to say whether it came from the author himself, or from a source used by him.'

At the same time, Sanday and Headlam in their *Commentary*, as well as Dr. Davidson in his *Introduction*, have professed to instruct their fellow-countrymen and those speaking the same language, and all these, trusting to the well-known erudition of these illustrious men, consider themselves now acquainted with 'the details of the study of the text, and the criticism of the various Dutch schemes of disintegrating the Epistle' to the Romans (M. W. Jacobus, *New World* (June, 1896), p. 372). This is further proved by their being able to perorate in this fashion: 'Such theories'—as those developed by us concerning the authenticity of Romans—'deserve attention only on psychological grounds; they serve to remind us that learning may go hand in hand with the wildest extravagance of opinion, that the blindest prejudice may be united with an utter absence of dogmatic belief' (W. E. Addis, *Inquirer*, Nov. 16, 1895). They rest, without a single word of protest, on what their grey-headed, and indeed most reverend and learned, Dr. Samuel Davidson said: 'This wave of hypercriticism . . . is devoid of interest for English theologians' (*Inquirer*, August 25, 1894).

IV.

It is not my business loudly to assert a contrary opinion to that of Dr. Davidson, but I may utter a warning against misunderstanding based on

faulty instruction. This 'wave of hypercriticism' has not for its aim 'attacks' on guiltless epistles, or to 'condemn' them. It does not stand opposed to the Pauline leading Epistles, but has in view nothing more or less than learning to understand those valuable memoirs of Christian antiquity better than has been the case up till now, in order to make the rich contents fertile for our knowledge of the oldest Christianity, its character, development, and history. Those who are considered to belong to this 'wave of hypercriticism' are no 'ingenious seekers after novelty.' They are too busy with the fulfilment of their functions and varied scientific research for this kind of work. Although they do not consider themselves ingenious, they are not simple enough to seek for 'imaginary dependencies on the Gospels,' nor do they wish to remove by any artifice whatsoever the 'credibility' of certain writings. They do ask occasionally whether other writings might be found to depend on the Gospels, and how it is with their supposed 'credibility.' Their standpoint is that of a perfectly free, and as far as possible impartial, research, which cannot be bound by any tradition, either dogmatic or scientific. If they err, they will be glad to be instructed, but with arguments, not with great words, or with appeals to critics who have been unable to make themselves acquainted with their studies up till now, because as far as they read them they did so 'im Bann der Vorurteile.'

They hold that criticism can and must scrutinize everything, even what some people who may belong to the 'best critics' in a certain circle consider the most critical, that is, superior to any criticism, and about which a strict *noli me tangere* ought to be taken into consideration. They do not know any reason why, in the research into the origin of the 13 or 14 Pauline Epistles, an exception should be made in favour of the four to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians. They consider it their duty to ask these writings as well for their credentials. With all respect for Baur and the great merits of the Tübingen school called after him, they cannot see any guarantee for the justness of their way of considering the matter, nor any reason for exempting the leading Epistles from research as to their birth, in the fact that they are faithfully accepted by these men. They judge that if in inquiries about authenticity in other instances no positive value is allowed to external

evidence, it cannot be done here either. The so-called old witnesses generally prove only that the works under examination were extant when these witnesses wrote. The very utmost that can be added in their favour is that they considered that these works originated from the persons under whose names they mention them. But this is no guarantee for the justness of that opinion, as is generally acknowledged by the 'best critics' as soon as they come to deal with writings whose authenticity seems suspicious to them. The ancient witnesses were not critical in the sense which we give to that word. When the contents pleased them, the epistle or the book was welcomed by them, irrespective of its author. They did not make any inquiry as to its authenticity. It is even a question whether they did not often know that they had to do with pseud-epigrapha while they were busying themselves with the creation of new pseud-epigrapha. Besides, they lived, as a rule, too long after the time in which the supposed apostolical authors must have worked for us to found anything of importance on their conviction, if they had one, as to the authenticity of the intended writings. We do not know the exact period at which the oldest witnesses for the Pauline leading Epistles, Clemens Romanus, Basilides, and others lived. But they belong, at anyrate, to the second century. Generally, we adopt the opinion that Paul died in A.D. 64. The witnesses are bearers of a tradition connected, rightly or not, with a particular writing. That tradition must be looked into independently, its truth examined as exactly as possible.

As often as the question is about the authenticity or non-authenticity of any writing, the essential part of criticism has to do with the internal grounds. Internal evidence must decide. However, once more to confine ourselves to the Pauline leading Epistles, this does not compel us to see an identity of language and style, dogmatic and religious contents with the supposed Pauline language and style, the description given by ourselves of his religion, persuasions, and thoughts. As long as we do not know whether we possess authentic Epistles from Paul or not, we cannot form a judgment about this and that. Until that time, perfect silence is indispensably necessary. When one sets oneself to free and impartial research as to the authenticity of the Pauline leading Epistles, there is no greater self-deception

than making oneself in all simplicity believe that one hears Paul speaking, recognizes his language, his image, recalls his spirit, and with rich oratorical turns declares further things of that kind because —because one had learned previously to form an idea of Paul, of his religious physiognomy, of his appearance in writings, of his customs and manners, way of speaking and thinking, etc., with the help of those Epistles whose authenticity was not then doubted. This is the great fault of Baur and his school, for which already he has been so often reproached alike by orthodox and liberal theologians, and also by Dr. Davidson (vol. i. p. 20), but of which, all the same, the 'best critics' have made themselves continuously guilty on this side of the ocean as well as the other.

Internal evidence does not come from outside. It does not communicate itself to us except by earnest and thorough examination of the writing or writings in question. Whoever wants to become acquainted with the Pauline leading Epistles in order to put himself and others in the way of a possible answer to the question as to their origin, ought to read and study them according to form and contents without cherishing beforehand a decided opinion as to their origin. Either begin by accepting the authenticity or not, but always leave room for the opposite opinion. The exegesis of one who does not do this is not free but bound, bound to tradition, bound to a fiction. The one proper basis, the only truthful internal evidence fails him. These are the principles on which this 'wave of hypercriticism' should be conducted. If there are unconscious mistakes, let one point them out. But one need not get angry. The indignation of a learned man proves nothing except his momentary inability to refute his scientific opponent.

V.

This wave of hypercriticism, Dr. Davidson assures us, 'will soon pass away, if indeed it has not already done so.'

This last can be contradicted safely. He who says it shows himself not well up in the particulars on which his assertion rests. Up till now not one of those who are considered as belonging to this 'wave' has, as far as I know, proved faithless. They go on, keeping high the banner under which they strive, proclaiming their conviction and defending it when necessary.

Will that be of any avail, or will this 'wave' not

soon pass away altogether, notwithstanding their zeal every possible way? Who can tell? Prophesying is dangerous work, especially when the question turns on things which one does not know at all or only in a very faulty manner. It is safest to leave the result to time and the power of truth. 'Tandem bona causa triumphat.' 'Magna est veritas et praevalebit.' All can depend upon that.

Those of this 'wave' are of good courage. They copy with gladness their Paul, while they are looked upon as written down to death: *ὡς ἀποθνῆσκοντες καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶμεν* (2 Co 6⁹).

'Nubacula est, transibit' was the motto of the great Dutch theologian, Gisbertus Voetius, in heart and soul orthodox, with which he, like an earnest, pious man, does not only try to comfort himself for the sorrows of earth and the disappointments of life, but also tried to console himself and others as often as any apparition of something new in the ecclesiastic or scientific world troubled them. 'Nubacula est, transibit' a great many before and after him have cried, in the same or similar words, with regard to several 'waves,' which have soon afterwards got the ascendancy over them or have sometimes carried them away with their irresistible speed. Such prophets have never been able to obstruct the course of scientific research.

'Nubacula est, transibit' 'the best critics of Germany' declared when Baur and his companions appeared, and, with their new contemplation of the old Christian past, seemed to ridicule science, its best representatives, and most firmly established results. 'A wave of hypercriticism, devoid of interest for English theologians,' added the Davidsons of those days. Their namesakes, now already for a long time grown grey in the service of science, have come forward as the best interpreters of the Tübingen school for the thoughtful party of theologians of Great Britain and America. Why should it be otherwise with the 'wave of hypercriticism' now spoken of, whose task it is to continue the work commenced by Baur and to scrutinize once more the grounds on which the foundation of our knowledge of the oldest Christianity rests?

Notwithstanding much disappointment coming from many a circle where the contrary might be expected, signs which give courage are not wanting. To recall a single instance: H. J. Holtzmann, one of the 'best critics of Germany,' in the first edition

of his *Lehrbuch der hist.-krit. Einl. in das N.T.*, published in 1885, said this wave of hypercriticism was already hidden away in the grave of history. He bestowed only these words upon it: 'Die von Evanson, B. Bauer, und A. D. Loman unternommenen Angriffe gehören der Geschichte der Kritik an' (p. 224). It could not be more decisively and sparingly touched upon.

But stop; in the third edition, published in 1892, the words quoted are altered. The objections raised against the authenticity of the leading Epistles are no longer relegated to the 'history of criticism.' 'The attacks undertaken by Evanson (1792) and Bauer, later by A. D. Loman, A. Pierson, S. A. Naber, and W. C. van Manen, afterwards also by Steck and Völter,' are discussed in some detail, albeit incompletely and indecisively (pp. 206-208). We even find (pp. 183-186) a new paragraph bestowed upon the description of 'the radical criticism,' by which, in distinction from the 'critical school,' ours is meant.

Others do not forbear to express their sorrow over the discord which has arisen in the international camp of liberal scholars in consequence of our views on the origin of the Pauline leading Epistles, although we, as they remark, are all standing on the same scientific ground, and start with the same critical principles. If they could only resolve now, led by this conviction, to make themselves better acquainted with our main contentions, and with the books which we have written, laying aside the 'Bann der Vorurteile,' they would certainly, though not at once or perhaps ever in all points, give us their approval. At first they might perhaps even continue to protest with powerful arguments, but at length, I have no doubt, they would acknowledge that we have seen rightly on the main point. They would soon help us to remove the mistakes made by us in elaborating our new ideas, to fill the gaps remaining after our research, to erect as firmly as possible the building of our knowledge of the oldest Christianity according to this modified plan on true grounds. Peace would be restored between friends congenial in mind, and this wave of hypercriticism brought a notable stage farther on its way towards blessing the literary, theological, and scientific research peculiar to our days, with the precious talent of distinguishing between truth and error entrusted to it, to the advantage of all.