

ARTICLE VII.

NOTICE OF DAVIDSON'S INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE value of this elaborate work will depend, in part, on the answer to the following question, Is it wise to bring before the British and American public objections to the genuineness and authenticity of the canonical books, which have been urged only in Germany, and which may possibly never be heard of in any other country, even if these objections are met by able and satisfactory replies? Shall the antidote be furnished where the disease is unknown? We are disposed to answer this question in the affirmative. Some of these cavils, indeed, for they are not worthy of the name of objections, are so trivial that they will not repay the time and talent necessary to describe them. Not a few of the allegations of such writers as Schwegler against the Gospel of John, might be suffered quietly to float into the limbo that speedily awaits them. It is degrading to an honorable man to try to discuss them. It is true, also, that objections which have weight or plausibility with a German, may find no favor with an Englishman or an American. They rest on a German basis only, are fitted to a German idiosyncrasy. One, who has a tolerable measure of common sense, even if inclined to skepticism, would perceive no special pertinence in them. One educated under the influence of the views on mental philosophy prevalent wherever the English language is spoken, finds it difficult to understand fully either the objections or the answers to them. Accordingly, to discuss biblical topics in the German method, requires caution, sound judgment, acquaintance with the peculiar character and tendencies of the English and American mind. In our well-meant but ill-advised efforts, we may perplex and unsettle the faith of Christians; the objection may occasion an injury which the answer can never repair.

Still, we are disposed to welcome a treatise like that of Dr. Davidson, which goes so thoroughly into the recent German criticism on the Gospels, adducing and overthrowing the most plausible objections to the truth of the evangelical history, which the "latest form" of German neology has brought forward. In the first place, in the final result, the Gospel will stand on a firmer basis. Every new assault only reveals its impregnable position. Every fresh trial only shows the

sterling character of the gold. An attempt to degrade Shakspeare or Milton from the position which they now occupy, only excites wonder or contempt, and is sure to recoil on the head of the assailant. So it will soon be in relation to the Gospels, ultimately, even in Germany. Books that can outlive such an array of learning and ingenuity as has been directed against the evangelists within the last twenty years, must be divine. The effect of the unsuccessful, reiterated attacks which are made upon them, will be to place them on that high eminence where the mere critic and scholar shall be content to let them remain, open indeed to still profounder investigation and ever widening illustration, but in trustworthiness no longer assailable. It is coming to this result even in Germany, if we understand the signs of the times. Most of those who have impugned the authority of the Gospels, or parts of them, since the days of Strauss, are but his feeble imitators. Even the wavering critics, as De Wette, seem almost ashamed to refer to B. B., as they abbreviate Bruno Bauer.¹ Writers of the stamp of Schweizer, Schwegler, and Zeller, are left to gather up the crumbs which fall from their master Strauss's table. Really, some of the difficulties and hypotheses which they adduce, would have subjected a member of college, one hundred years ago, to discipline. Schweizer, e. g., undertakes to separate the spiritual substance of John's Gospel from a Galilean interpolation, of a different character! As a proof of a gradual return to sounder views, we may mention that De Wette complains, in one of his late Prefaces, that the younger scholars are coming back to the "old orthodoxy." The persons to whom he refers, we suppose, are Ebrard, Wieseler, Stier, J. P. Lange, etc. Meyer, in the second edition of his Gospels, is returning to "conservatismus." The tendency in the late edition of Winer's Bible Dictionary, is in the same direction. Even De Wette himself, in the preface to his Apocalypse, appears to be much alarmed at the progress which the "young Hegelianism" is making in Germany.

Again, a promptitude in meeting the ablest and most learned of the opponents of the Gospel, may not be unattended with good results, even if much of the German skepticism is not transferred to English soil. It reveals a confidence in the power of truth, a vigilance in guarding the fortress, a keen vision in detecting coming danger, and a learning and ability which must command respect. If German criticism is to be subjected to a criticism as sharp, and a learning as acute in England and the United States, joined to a judgment and common sense much more trustworthy, a reflex influence may be ex-

¹ Of De Wette's opinion of Von Baur, see a note on p. 348.

erted on Germany herself. A more healthful tone will pervade her theological literature. More caution will be exhibited in propounding startling theories, and some respect for the views of scholars of other nations will be cherished. Hitherto, the Germans have had the field of biblical criticism, with few exceptions, to themselves, much, as we conceive, to their own disadvantage.

We may add, in the third place, that it will be impossible to exclude German biblical criticism, either from England or from the United States. The attempt to lay an embargo on any species of foreign literature is preposterous. Strauss's *Life of Jesus* has been translated in England, and is in the process of diffusion there and in this country. Another book, which makes sad havoc with the Old Testament, De Wette's *Introduction to the Old Testament*, has been brought out in two large and handsome volumes in Boston. Other translations might be named, which contain more or less of what is rightly named destructive criticism. Many of the evangelical theologians have not wholly escaped the neological influences so rife around them. Besides, the knowledge of the German language is greatly extending. Twenty scholars now read German commentaries in the original, where one scholar used them twenty years ago. The theological publishers in Germany have, for some years, looked to this country as one of their most important foreign customers. The German emigration hitherward will open another door for the influx of good and of bad German books. So that the evils of German literature, whatever they may be, will find an introduction and currency, just as it has been impossible to exclude a pernicious French literature. The only safeguard is that which Dr. Davidson has adopted—to meet learning with learning, argument with argument, and if possible, before the poison is introduced, prepare an effectual remedy.

We will now proceed to give some account of Dr. Davidson's work. It is entitled an "Introduction to the New Testament; containing an examination of the most important questions relating to the authority, interpretation and integrity of the canonical books, with reference to the latest inquiries." It is printed in the most finished style of London typography by Samuel Bagster and Sons. The first volume contains the Four Gospels in 430 pages 8vo. The second volume will be published about the first of July next, and will probably end with the Pastoral Epistles. The third volume will include the remainder of the New Testament. In the first volume the matter is distributed as follows: 137 pages to Matthew, 32 to Mark, 50 to Luke, and 148 to John. This proportion is a pretty good indication

of the relative importance of the questions which have been started in relation to the several gospels, or the nature and number of the attacks which have been lately made upon them. The concluding pages are devoted to a consideration of the correspondences in the first three gospels. One part of what is commonly embraced in Introductions is omitted in this work, viz. the criticism of the text. This topic the author proposes to take up at large in a new edition of his Lectures on Biblical Criticism. The following topics are treated, at more or less length, in relation to each of the gospels: Some notices of the writer, the persons for whose use it was designed in the first instance, the apostolic origin or authenticity, integrity, time and place in which it was written, characteristic peculiarities and contents. In addition, there is a discussion on the language in which Matthew's gospel was originally written, relation of Mark's gospel to Peter, and the language in which it was written, Luke's preface and relation of his gospel to Paul, the immediate occasion and object of John's gospel, and a comparison of its contents with those of the synoptical gospels.

The question in relation to the language in which Matthew's gospel was first composed, is very elaborately and learnedly discussed. The conclusion is, that it was written in the Aramaean or Syro-Chaldaic, "the ancient historical testimony being unanimous" in favor of this position. The evidence of Papias, the earliest witness, whom Irenaeus terms "a hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp," is patiently examined, and "on the whole it would appear that small as his abilities were, he was a credible and competent witness in the matter before us." "Great stress too must be laid on the testimony of Pantaenus, because it is unquestionably independent of Papias." In addition to the evidence of antiquity, Dr. D. argues that as the gospel was written for the Jews in Palestine, it would be more natural for Matthew to write in Syro-Chaldaic, as it was the vernacular tongue and especially dear to the Jews, even allowing that the Greek had attained great currency. Special stress is laid on the circumstance that Josephus terms the Syro-Chaldaic *πάτριος γλώσση* as contrasted with the Greek which he terms *ξένη καὶ ἀλλοδαπή διάλεκτος*. Besides, the Hebraisms of the first gospel are favorable to the hypothesis of a Hebrew original. The mode of quotation is also urged on the same side, though many quotations very nearly coincide with the Septuagint. The strongest arguments against a Hebrew original "may be reduced to four." The first is, that the old Syriac version, the Peshito, was made from the Greek, not the Hebrew. It would certainly be very strange for a Syriac translator to prefer a Greek copy instead of a Syro-Chaldaic original, especially, since from the

relation of the latter to Syriac, a large part of the work would be done to his hand. It is attempted to weaken the force of this reasoning by showing that Christianity was diffused in the north-eastern parts of Syria, not directly from Palestine, but from Antioch, where the Greek edition of Matthew was perhaps the only one known, the Syro-Chaldaic not having travelled out of Palestine. It is said, again, that there are no characteristics of a translation in the Greek. "This is merely a proof of its excellence. It bears the marks of an original. The author was so fully competent to his task, as to produce a version, having all the appearance and character of an original." Again, *paronomasias* occur in the Greek gospel. "This fact is neutralized by the circumstance, that they are also found in the Septuagint." Lastly, the Greek gospel only is quoted or referred to by the early fathers. The Hebrew document must have been unaccountably neglected. "But if we reflect on the fortunes of the Jewish Christians in Palestine till the time of Hadrian, we cannot be surprised at the paucity of copies which must necessarily have been made, nor the neglect on the part of the Gentile Christians of a Hebrew gospel which they were unable to read."

We confess that we are not quite prepared to accede to this conclusion. The external evidence is in favor of a Syro-Chaldaic original; the internal evidence is against it. The Greek gospel certainly bears all the marks of an original. And if Matthew wrote a Syro-Chaldaic gospel, possessing of course apostolical authority, a trustworthy history of our Lord, from an eye-witness, it is very remarkable that this gospel should perish so suddenly, that there should be no hint in regard to its fortunes in the fathers, that they should fail to quote it, that there should be no legend whatever in regard to its fate. Then if some other person had translated the Syro-Chaldaic original into Greek, either with or without Matthew's sanction, why is there no allusion to it? The fathers are quite careful to report the sanction which Mark's gospel receives from his connection with Peter, and Luke's from his relation to Paul. But there is a profound silence in relation to Matthew and his translator.

Dr. Davidson vindicates the authenticity of the first two chapters of Matthew against the attacks of Schleiermacher, De Wette, Norton and others. The reasons alleged against this passage are of a subjective kind, and are entitled to little weight. They amount to this: that we cannot reconcile all the discrepancies between Matthew's chronology and Luke's, nor understand the nature of the star that appeared to the Magi, nor perfectly comprehend the different repre-

sentations in the two gospels in respect to Joseph's abode at Bethlehem and Nazareth.

One point discussed in the Introduction to Mark, is the relation of this gospel to Peter. "It may be inferred from the varying notices of some of the fathers, with some degree of probability, that Peter was not with Mark when the latter undertook to write the gospel." "If the gospel contain a faithful abstract of Peter's discourses, the writer having been exceedingly careful to omit nothing of what he had heard from the lips of his spiritual master, and to set down nothing falsely, as John the presbyter assures us, we may safely rely on it as ultimately based on apostolical authority." The integrity of the last eleven verses of the gospel is discussed at considerable length, and the conclusion is adopted that they were added by another person after Mark's death. We think, however, that this decision is not borne out by the facts, and that the preponderance of arguments is in favor of the genuineness. Dr. D. says that "on the whole the external arguments in favor of the paragraph outweigh those on the other side." In our opinion, they *greatly* outweigh them. The passage is found in all the existing Greek MSS., except B, in all the ancient versions, the Syriac of Jerusalem included, in all the Evangelistaria and Synaxaria, and is sanctioned by nearly all the fathers. There is some reason to suppose that the objections to the passage had their origin in exegetical difficulties. Some of the internal arguments alleged against it, seem to us to have but little weight; e. g. "the desire of the miraculous is too great for Mark, vs. 17, 18. The kind of miracles indicated, and the power of performing them attributed to all believers, are adverse to the supposition of the evangelist being the writer." But was this promise more comprehensive, or has it an air of greater strangeness than the performance? Thus Acts 5: 15, "They brought forth the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." Acts 2: 4, "And they were *all* (believers) filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues." So from Acts 5: 17, it would seem as if the great body of the Samaritan believers received the power of working miracles. The same general diffusion of miraculous power, we infer from the first epistle to the Corinthians. Again, the words "he that believeth and *is baptized* shall be saved, are very suspicious. They remind us of the post-apostolic period when a greater efficacy was attributed to baptism than it was intended to have." But has the insertion of this second condition in this place, an aspect more strange than Peter's summons, Acts 2: 38, "Repent and *be baptized* every one of you," or than our

Lord's declaration that men must be born of *water* and of the *spirit*? "The style of the whole piece is unlike that of the gospel. Its manner resembles that of brief notices, extracted from larger accounts and loosely linked together." But it has to our mind no more of this fragmentary and summary manner than other passages in Mark, e. g. 1: 9—21, where four or five important events are crowded into a few verses. "Instead of *ἐκβάλλειν ἀπό*, Mark uses *ἐκβάλλειν ἐκ*." Yet he does this only in *one* place, 7: 26. *ὁ κύριος* is used in the 19th and 20th verses, instead of *Ἰησοῦς*. Mark nowhere employs this appellation." But perhaps it was natural to apply the term Lord to Jesus after his resurrection, as before his crucifixion, Jesus had applied it to himself as recorded in Mark. On the whole, though there is weight in some of the internal objections, yet they do not throw so much doubt over the passage as to outweigh the strong external testimony in its favor. The introduction of a number of *ἀπαξ λεγόμενα* into a passage would not be a circumstance so extraordinary as the abrupt closing of the gospel at ch. 16: 8.

The author comes to the conclusion that Luke's gospel is not of canonical authority because of the special influence which Paul had upon it. Its credibility and authority must be placed on another basis equally secure. That it fully deserves its present position among the gospels is unquestionable; but it does not deserve it by virtue of any truth in the ancient tradition." The internal objections against the authenticity of Luke, viz. in the matter of the census, 2: 12, and in the alleged false chronology in regard to Lysanias, 3: 1, are examined, and shown to be capable of fair, if not of perfectly satisfactory explanation. The integrity of Luke seems to be unimpeachable. Vv. 13, 14 of chap. 22, have been assailed, but without adequate reason.

On John's gospel our author lays out his strength, as it has been pertinaciously assailed and with not a little acuteness by numerous recent critics. The time and place in which this gospel was written are uncertain. The place was probably Ephesus. The early external evidence establishes the apostolic origin of John's gospel. Yet it has been assailed by various writers on historic grounds. A recent critic, Lützelberger, ("The Church Tradition on the apostle John, 1840") has produced a work which Bleek characterizes as the most important attack made upon the gospel in modern times, and which has had no little influence on the later productions of Baur and Schwegler. It has been assumed as an indisputable fact that John the apostle lived and labored in Asia Minor during the latter part of his life. Lützelberger attempts to destroy the credit of the ecclesiastical tradition on which the fact rests. The acute reasonings and

plausible conjectures of this writer are met and rebutted with great ability by Dr. Davidson. "How impotent," he concludes, "do these objections appear! How unlike the statements of men simply desirous of arriving at truth. If the bad cause they resolved to espouse did not appear desperate in their eyes, they have resorted at least to desperate weapons."

A group of internal objections are next considered, viz. diversity in regard to the scene and duration of Jesus' public ministry, the diversity relating to the description of his person, and that which belongs to his discourses. John's peculiar temperament, his intimacy with his Master, the fact that he wrote at a later day, probably in Asia Minor, and for a different class of readers, may account for some of these diversities. Again, there are great resemblances between him and the Synoptists. All which is taught in the gospel of John may be found in the other gospels or in the epistles. It is not necessary to trace his doctrine of the Logos to Philo or to any extra-Palestinian source. The germs of it are in the Old Testament. The geographical and archaeological difficulties in John have never been proved to be insuperable. E. g. Bethabara may be the true reading for the town called Bethany at the Jordan, or there may have been two Bethanias. The Synoptists place the principal scene of Christ's ministry in Galilee, John places it in Judea; they appear to limit its duration to one year, he alludes to several passovers. They, however, intimate that the Saviour's ministry was not confined to Galilee, and their speaking only of his last journey to Jerusalem does not exclude similar journeys. In order that we may obtain a comprehensive view of the Messiah's person, the descriptions of all the evangelists must be combined. Xenophon's delineation of Socrates does not exclude that of Plato. That Jesus' discourses, as recorded by John, are different both in matter and form from those found in the other gospels is obvious, but it remains to be proved that the one class is inconsistent with the other.

After discussing the immediate occasion and object of the gospel, that its special object was not polemic, and that it was not designed, except in a subordinate sense, as a supplement to the Synoptists, the author considers briefly the characteristics of the gospel, in manner and style, and then discusses at some length the question of the genuineness of chap. 21, of the two last verses in this chapter, of chap. 7, v. 51, 8: 11, and of 5: 3, 4.

We have thus referred to a few of the topics in this instructive volume. The first and the decided impression which the reader receives is, that the author has mastered his subject, has patiently threaded his way through the toilsome labyrinth of German research, and has

clearly presented the main questions relating to the gospels in the light of the latest and most thorough investigations. Painful as it must be in some respects for a believer in the gospels to explore the cavils and objections of modern skepticism, yet the author has not shrunk in the slightest degree from his task. The inquiry is not only thorough and extensive, but embraces the most recent literature. So far as we can judge, the author has allowed nothing of importance to escape him. We are also struck with the general candor and impartiality of the discussion. If an objection has apparent weight, it is not summarily dismissed. If the arguments of the friends of revelation appear to be more specious than solid, the author has independence enough to say so. An evident desire to arrive at the truth, without fear or bias, pervades the volume. Though this honesty of purpose may occasionally lead to results which will surprise the unreflecting reader of the gospels, yet, in the final result, the authenticity of the gospels is placed on a firm basis. One rises from the perusal of this volume with the deepest conviction, that he is not following cunningly devised fables, or honestly devised myths. A fundamental discussion like that of Dr. D's, is attended with an excellent moral effect. The sharper the scrutiny to which the evangelists are subjected, the more intelligent and the profounder is the faith which one feels in them. Thus a scientific discussion, if conducted with seriousness and dignity, becomes a means of grace, prompts to faith in God's word, and to love towards the Saviour.

This Introduction is not designed to be popular in the common acceptance of that word. It is not composed in a style which will be attractive to the mass, perhaps, of educated men. The author is very sparing of ornament, makes no popular appeals, indulges in very few, stirring descriptions. The style is direct and perspicuous, and the entire method is scientific. Occasionally, it seems to us there is a little unnecessary dryness. E. g. the enunciation of the topics at the beginning of the discussion on each gospel, might be less formal and skeleton-like, and when the author is considering the characteristics of the gospels, there might have been more pleasant descriptions and a greater outflow of feeling without injury to the scientific aspect of the treatise. Still, the book is, in this respect, substantially as it should be a systematic and exact exhibition of the subject. The study of it ought not to be confined to a few biblical scholars and clergymen. It treats of a subject which surpasses every other in interest, the records of the life and atoning death of our Lord. All clergymen, all who are called to defend the gospel in these days when it is attacked from so many quarters, will here find armor on which they can rely.