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CRITICAL NOTES

THE HON. A. G. BURR

JUDGE OF THE NINTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
RUGBY, N. D.

TO THE EDITOR OF BIBLIOTHECA SACRA :

DEAR SIR :

In the January, 1922, issue of your Quarterly I find an interesting note on the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by Rev. Wm. H. Bates, D. D. In this note Dr. Bates cites the Second Epistle of Peter to show that Paul had written an epistle to the Hebrews, and, on page 95, he says, in substance that this citation and its inference has been overlooked in Commentaries, etc., so far as he knows, Doubtless this is correct, and his deduction is another instance how the minds of Biblical Scholars will agree, without suggestion. His statement, however, called to my mind the argument of the writer Gausson of Geneva in his Canon of the Holy Scriptures—a book published in 1862, and which is among the old books of my father's library. It is a book he used in his theological studies in Scotland and which I find of great interest today. This argument of Dr. Bates' is set forth by Gausson on page 327 of that book, as one of the numerous arguments he advances to sustain the Pauline Authorship of the Epistle. How any impartial critic can say "The case against the Pauline authorship is closed" passes my comprehension. I make no claim to linguistic scholarship; but will epitomize Prof. Gausson's argument and add a few reflections of my own.

The claim of an Hebrew original is largely assumption. No one ever claimed to have seen such a document, and there is no reason whatever to assume that because the letter is addressed to Hebrews therefore the Hebrew language must of necessity have been used. Greek had been spoken, even in Jerusalem, almost four centuries before,

when Alexander the Great entered the city, and doubtless continued to be used. Hebrews in the days of Paul had separate synagogues for those who could not speak Hebrew—for those who spoke Greek. Dr. Gaussen says there is nothing to indicate a translation; everything bears the impress of originality.

The writer shows a thorough acquaintance with Hebrew forms and ceremonies; with the so-called legends and early history of the people. True, any scholar might be as well informed; but this does not argue against Paul's authorship, for certainly he would know. It is a fact, however, that there are few men like Bryce, who can make themselves so familiar with the more or less obscure history of another people as to pass as a native; therefore, the author is at least as likely to have been a Jew as to have been a Gentile. Then there are passages in the Epistle where the personal pronoun is used that may indicate the writer claimed to be one of the race. Chap. 9, verses 1 to 7, some might say, indicated a foreigner writing to foreigners not so well acquainted with the history of the people referred to; but Chap. 11, vs. 40 and Chap. 12, vs. 28 might indicate the writer was a Jew.

Then Timothy was living and is called "brother," the way Paul designates him in Second Corinthians, Philemon and Colossians. Evidently those who claim the epistle was written in the third century overlook this fact with reference to Timothy.

The writer was in jail, for he speaks of "my bonds" (chap. 10, vs. 34) and, if Paul, this may have been Cesarea or Rome. My guess would be Rome, for we have the record that Timothy was with Paul in Rome. It may depend upon the interpretation of the term, "They of Italy."

Why should critics be so insistent in stating that the expression—they of Italy—shows people of Italy away from Rome but sending salutations to Hebrews in Rome? Why is it not just as likely that Paul, in Rome, was writing to Hebrews and sends the salutation of Christian Hebrews who were in Rome? They of Italy—those Hebrews in Italy who are now Christians—salute you.

Now all this may apply to any other author as well as

to Paul; but at least it does not argue against Paul. He fits all of these circumstances. Where all the facts of circumstantial evidence point to one source you have the right to adopt that as a theory, at least, and one theory that includes all the proven facts is as good as any other theory doing the same.

Then when we consider Paul in prison, with plenty of time to choose his style, writing on a theme that calls for an entirely different setting, drawing on his store of knowledge accumulated since he was a mere child, and presenting his argument from an entirely different angle, it would seem to me the argument, if the scholars find such an one, from difference in style is not worth a great deal.

Apparently the Temple was still standing; the sacrifices were yet being offered; and while they could "see the day approaching" yet it must have been apparent to far-seeing men of that day that the obstinate hostility of the Jews to the Romans was inevitably dooming the City and the Temple. Now, if Paul was in Rome, writing to the Hebrew in the East, in Jerusalem and other places, he would sound the warning and "They of Italy" would send their greetings.

To cap it all, we have the reference in Peter's epistle—the reference cited by Dr. Bates and by Prof. Gaussen. All the other facts shown will apply to Paul—possibly more so than to any other conceivable writer—but here is a distinct statement showing he did write an epistle to the Hebrews and this contained "things hard to be understood." Of course, it was hard to understand. He, in Hebrews, argues that the forms and ceremonies the orthodox Jew said were permanent, were merely the shadow of the coming event. It would change the view of the Jew as to the mission of his race; its relative importance; its place in the scheme of events. This last argument—Peter's statement—seems to me to add the final proof necessary to make the theory of the circumstantial evidence conclusive. Of course, if Peter did not write second Peter, and it is merely a pious fraud, then its statement is worthless; but it is peculiar that the critics,

destructive in their nature, first build a theory they want to establish and then coolly dispose of evidence against their theory by brushing it aside as fraudulent. It is fraudulent because it conflicts with their theory. Instead of getting all the facts and then seeing the law that runs through them all, they arrange a theory and call those things facts that substantiate it, and all the rest fiction.

When we find, in history, that a substantial part of the Church always accepted this epistle as one of Paul's writings, and there is nothing but speculation to combat it, the burden of proof must certainly rest on those who deny Paul's authorship, and this is not sustained without substantial evidence.

Yours very truly,

A. G. BURR.