

our Lord's crucifixion a week later was to be a royal enthronement, a 'lifting up'; and, like the crucifixion, it drew all men to him: 'See,' the priests complain, 'the whole world goes after him.'

There, then, John lays before us the life of Christ in its innermost significance. It is limitlessly full of meaning. It is not the story—pathetic, exciting, edifying—of a great man. It is for all men, for us each day as for the Jews then, a challenge and an appeal, a call to pass judgment: can we see him for what he is? can we see that Jesus is the Christ—that in these historical events the full meaning of life is contained? It is very literally a crucial test; and on the issue depends life or death for each of us. These things are written in order that we may believe, and believing have life in his name.

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THE UNITY OF SECOND PETER : A
RECONSIDERATION

THERE is no book in the New Testament that indicates its author so clearly as does the Second Epistle of Saint Peter. He is Simeon Peter a servant and Apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1); a beloved brother of St Paul (3:15). With others he was an eyewitness of the Transfiguration on 'the Holy Mount' (1:16-18). His death was foretold by the Lord (1:13ff.; cf. John 21:18ff.). Yet the authenticity of no New Testament writing is in such doubt, perhaps, as that of 2 Peter. There is no clear evidence of it in Patristic literature before Origen (d. 253) who says it was then a disputed writing.¹ The situation was no better in the time of St Jerome (d. 420).²

Grotius (d. 1645) and critics since his time have renewed the old doubts and added many other difficulties to the one that troubled the contemporaries of St Jerome. 2 Peter differs not merely in style but also in doctrine from 1 Peter. It is seemingly dependent on Jude which many critics think best dated after A.D. 70 at the earliest. Our epistle styles the first Christian generation 'Fathers' (3:4), which presupposes that they had died some time before. It is hard to see how such words could be written before the Apostle's death in 64 or 67. Together with this, certain objections arising from a delay in the second coming are answered (3:4-10), difficulties which may have

¹ *In Johann. Commen.*, v. 3. cf. Eusebius *H.E.*, vi, 25, 8

² *De viris illustribus* 1: 'Scripsit [Petrus] duas epistolas quae catholicae nominantur: quarum secunda a plerisque ejus esse negatur, propter stili cum priori dissonantiam.'

been occasioned by the fall of the Holy City in A.D. 70.¹ Further evidence for a late dating is seen in the reference to a collection of Paul's Epistles which are considered as part of Scripture (3:15-16).

These arguments have led the majority of non-Catholics to regard the epistle as coming from a pen other than that of the Apostle Peter. An ever-increasing number of Catholic scholars² seems to recognise the convergent strength of these arguments and, while excluding any forgery or intention to deceive, ascribe the epistle to a writer other than the prince of the Apostles.

A question connected with the authenticity of the epistle, though distinct from it, is that of the letter's original unity. The entire second chapter of the epistle is contained in the epistle of Jude and, with very few exceptions, in the same order. This very naturally raises the question of dependence. The weight of evidence seems to favour direct dependence of one epistle on the other, the possibility of both having borrowed from a common source being rarely even considered.³ Most critics consider that the arguments for Peter's dependence on Jude are weightier if not entirely apodictic.⁴ It was but to be expected that this interpolation of the epistle of Jude into 2 Peter should have led to doubts about this latter's original integrity. In the seventeenth century Grotius⁵ maintained that the third chapter of 2 Peter originally constituted a distinct letter. Bertholdt⁶ later defended the theory that the second chapter was a later interpolation dependent on Jude, and two years later Ullmann⁷ wrote that the original letter of the Apostle Peter is to be found in chapter 1. Later in the last century Gess⁸ regarded 1:20b to 3:3a as an interpolation. The most noted of the interpolation school, however, is E. Kühl⁹ who believed that 2 Pet. 1:1-21 and 3:3-18 constitute the authentic

¹ cf. the arguments of the mockers in 3:4 with the signs of the Parousia and the fall of the Holy City in Matt. 24, esp. vv. 5, 12, 23-4, 29, 34

² J. Chaîne, *Les épîtres catholiques* in *Études Bibliques*, Paris 1939

J. Huby in *Initiation biblique*, Paris 1948, pp. 241-2

R. Leconte, *Les épîtres catholiques (Bible de Jerusalem)*, Paris 1953

Johann Michl, *Der Brief an die Hebräer und die Katholischen Briefe (Das Regensburger Neue Testament, Band 8)*, 1953

³ In Robson's position (see n. 19) Jude borrowed from one of the sources of 2 Peter while the editor of 2 Peter had Jude before him in his final redaction of these sources.

⁴ The arguments generally adduced for the priority of Jude are : a more concise, spontaneous and clearer style on the part of Jude ; his introduction (v. 4) seems to indicate his work is an original production, not a borrowing ; he makes no reference to errors as regards the Parousia as 2 Peter does ; it is easier to understand 2 Peter's omission of apocryphal references than Jude's introduction of them ; certain portions of 2 Peter are only understandable if the priority of Jude is accepted, e.g. 2 Peter 2:10, 11, 12, 17 and Jude 7-8, 9, 10, 12-13.

⁵ Grotius, *Adnotationes in Actus Apostolorum et in Epistolas Catholicas*, Paris 1641

⁶ *Einleitung* . . ., 1819, pp. 3157ff.

⁷ *Krit. Unter. des 2 Petri*, 1821

⁸ *Das apostol. Zeugnis von Chr. Person*, II, ii, 1879, pp. 412ff.

⁹ *Die Briefe Petri und Judae*, 6th ed., 1897

letter of the Apostle. To this the whole of chapter 2 and 3:1-2 were later interpolated from the epistle of Jude. Kühl found a supporter for his theory in Weiffenbach¹ in the following year. Outside of Germany, Renan² was at the same time propounding that our present 2 Peter is from the pen of a Roman Christian writing in A.D. 128. Wishing to reconcile the teaching of Peter and Paul this Christian bases himself on 1 Peter and adds phrases drawn piecemeal from various other sources.

None of these theories, however, ever gained a following. Writing in 1900 Chase considered that the 'suspicions of Kühl and his predecessors . . . must be dismissed as arbitrary and unsupported by internal or external evidence.'³ Nor has any theory denying the integrity of the epistle been taken more seriously since. The unity of 2 Peter seems to be an accepted fact in biblical scholarship : reference to the earlier theories denying such unity is merely made in some larger commentaries for the sake of scientific thoroughness. The decisive argument for the integrity of the writing according to these writers is the unity of style and language to be found throughout the entire work. The repetition of certain words throughout is a 'strong guarantee of its unity' according to Bigg⁴ : and makes any sectioning of the work impossible to admit, according to Chainé.⁵ The interpolation theories, on the other hand, are occasioned by certain abrupt interruptions in the logical development of the thought.⁶ Chainé admits such exist but thinks they merely show that the author did not write in a logical fashion.⁷

This can hardly be considered a sufficient explanation. It is not then surprising that from time to time a new interpolation theory enters the field if only to die as quickly for want of a following. In a very little-known work⁸ E. Iliff Robson made a thorough study of 2 Peter in 1915 and propounded the theory that the letter is composed of four originally distinct sources : A moral Fragment (1:5b-11) ; A Personal Statement and Narrative (1:12-18) ; A Prophetic Discourse (1:20b-2:19) and an Apocalyptic Fragment (3:3b-13). These, which were either of apostolic origin or with apostolic *imprimatur* circulated as distinct documents and were assembled by an editor who inserted

¹ In *Theolog. Literaturzeitung*, Nov. 1898, col. 364ff. The last five references are given in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Cheyne and Black), London 1903, col. 3684-5

² E. Renan, *L'Eglise Chrétienne*, 5th ed., Paris 1899, pp. 108-12

³ In Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Edinburgh 1900, III, p. 799

⁴ C. Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC), Edinburgh 1910, p. 226

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 32

⁶ Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 3, has this to say on the point : '2 Peter . . . is a thing of shreds and patches ; it passes, by what seem to be happy-go-lucky sutures, from exhortation to narrative, narrative to prophecy, prophecy to apocalyptic. We leave it with an air of puzzle and dissatisfaction.'⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 32

⁸ E. Iliff Robson, B.D., *Studies in the Second Epistle of St. Peter*, Cambridge 1915

the other verses. In the course of his review of Chainé's book *Père Benoit*, O.P. observes, in a footnote, that the composition of 2 Peter may possibly be explained by the hypothesis of an authentic Petrine writing taken up later by a disciple who completed it with the aid of Jude, recasting the entire document in the process.¹

It is not the intention of the present article to consider the individual or convergent probative value of the arguments put forward by any of the above theories. Our purpose is, instead, to examine certain other texts of the epistle which are generally overlooked or which receive a somewhat forced interpretation when the unity of the writing is maintained, whereas they are seen in a more natural light if its composite character is admitted. They may thus serve as indications to a solution of the problem.

The first of the passages we have to consider is 1:15. The author has already reminded his readers of their participation in the divine nature (1:4) and of the necessity of good works for entry into the everlasting kingdom (v. 5-11). In verse 12 he continues: 'Hence I mean to keep on reminding you of this, although you are aware of it and fixed in the truth as it is; (v. 13) so long as I am in this tent, I deem it proper to stir you up by way of reminder, (v. 14) since I know my tent must be folded up very soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me.' Verse 15 is rendered in much the same way by all translators and commentators²: 'Yes, I will see to it that when I am gone you will keep this constantly in mind,' or similar words. In this translation the author's preoccupation is that his readers *constantly*, or as occasion shall require, recall his teaching *after his death*. In other words, they take the Greek *hekástote* (constantly) to qualify *éxodos* (departure).

From the point of view of syntax, however, *hekástote* can qualify either *éxodos* or *spoudásô* (I will see to it) and two renderings are then syntactically possible: the one given above or: 'I will see to it on every occasion that presents itself (i.e. before I die) that you remember these things when I am gone.' It is this second meaning that seems best—if not exclusively to suit the context. Verse 15 is only the conclusion to verses 12-14 and a summary of what is taught there. Our author has told them that he thinks it right 'as long as he is in this tent,' i.e. alive, to remind them (v. 12): he intends to keep on reminding them or to remind them always of it, evidently before his death.

¹ *Vivre et Penser*, Paris 1941, p. 136, n. 2

² Except the Vulgate perhaps, which renders: *Dabo autem operam et frequenter habere vos post obitum meum, ut horum memoriam faciatis*. The RSV has: 'And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. The BJ: *Mais j'emploierai mon zèle à ce qu'en toute occasion, après mon départ, vous puissiez vous mettre ces choses en mémoire.*

What is more natural, then, in such a context than to take verse 15 to mean that he is going to let no occasion pass *before his death* without availing himself of it? This is all the more imperative now that his death is near (v. 14).

The writer does not say what means he shall employ 'as occasion presents itself' to assure that his teachings are remembered when he is gone. The authors—accepting the first-mentioned translation—are divided on the point. Some, e.g. Bigg and Mayor, see a probable allusion to the Gospel of St Mark, the interpreter of Peter, written while Peter was alive according to Eusebius¹ or after his death according to Irenaeus.² Others think the author has in mind a series of successors who will perpetuate his teaching. Others still, e.g. von Soden, Weiss, Windisch and Chaine believe the author is simply referring to the present letter. This latter opinion seems to be ruled out by the future tense: 'I *will* see to it.'

If we take *hekástote* to qualify *spoudásō* and as referring to the period before the author's death the plain meaning is that he intends sending further letters to the Christians and not merely one but many (always v. 12) if many occasions present themselves. Such letters being occasional in nature will not necessarily be lengthy. Their general purpose and content would be to remind the readers of the things they may have already known (v. 12), and in particular of the coming of the Lord and perhaps the prophecies referring to this coming (vv. 11 and 16-21).

Passing now from chapter 1 and its references to the Parousia (v. 16) we come to the third chapter where our epistle takes up the same theme after the digression, or interpolation, in the intervening chapter. Even the casual reader is struck by the abrupt passage from chapter 2 and the unexpected way in which the chapter opens.³ The concluding verses of chapter 2 compared deserts from the Way of Truth to a dog returning to his vomit. With the following chapter a new theme suddenly commences: 'This is already the second letter I am writing to you, beloved, and in both I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder to have you recollect the words spoken by the holy prophets beforehand and the command given by your apostles from the Lord and Saviour.' The entire first verse would fit the introduction of a letter far better than it does the concluding chapter. Two words in particular, *édē* and *deutéran*, require some explanation.

édē, 'already,' in its plain meaning implies that the other writing

¹ *H.E.*, II, 15, 2; III, 39, 15

² *Adv. haer.*, III, I, I

³ Robson notes on the passage: 'If we have had abruptness before it is much more pronounced here. There is little, if anything, to suggest connection with what immediately precedes . . .', *op. cit.*, p. 5.

referred to must have been quite recent and that the writer is quite conscious of this fact. We naturally ask what is the 'first letter' to which 2 Peter refers. The obvious answer is that it must be what tradition knows as 1 Peter. This is the view practically all commentators take, both those who deny the authenticity of 2 Peter and those who defend it. The only discordant voices are those of Spitta and Zahn who think our writer is referring to a lost letter of the Apostle. The view that the 'first epistle' referred to is 1 Peter encounters serious difficulty from both the words under consideration. Even if we accept 2 Peter as the genuine work of the Apostle we must admit a certain lapse of time between it and 1 Peter to explain the change of perspective in the teaching of the second coming and other doctrines. The Apostle could hardly refer to an epistle written so long before as 'recent'—he could never use 'already' at the beginning of the present chapter. The difficulty is greater still if we hold 2 Peter to be from another writer some twenty years or so after 1 Peter. In fact it is very hard to see how anyone wishing to pass for the Apostle Peter could ever use the particle.

A second difficulty against the above view, and one long since recognised, is the difference of doctrine in the two letters. In 2 Peter (3:1-2) the author says that in both epistles he stirs up their minds . . . to have them recollect the words spoken by the holy prophets. Despite the efforts of certain exegetes we must candidly admit that we fail to find either the contents or purpose of 1 Peter suitably described by these words. It is quite true that 1 Peter makes mention of the Prophets (1:10-12:25) but hardly in the sense here intended, nor does 1 Peter anywhere stir up the readers' 'pure minds' to remember their doctrine.

All these difficulties vanish if we consider the first letter referred to in 3:1-2 as the first chapter of 2 Peter, and the present third chapter as none other than one of these reminders that the author of 1:15 promised to send to his readers 'as occasion required or presented itself.' This 'first letter' could certainly be regarded as a recent letter, and the author of 3:1-2 would certainly be conscious of this fact. Together with this, the purpose and contents of chapter 1 are very exactly described here in 3:1-2. This is so clear that the older¹ and more recent² commentators, those who are not preoccupied with the epistle's unity¹ as well as those who warmly defend it,² recognise the parallelism. As in 3:1-2, so also in 1:12-13 he stirs them by way of reminder. In 1:15 he promises to see to it as occasion presents itself

¹ G. Estius, *In omnes D. Pauli Epistolas item in Catholicas Commentarii*, Moguntiae 1859, III, p. 627

John MacEvilly, *An Exposition on the Epistles of St. Paul and on the Catholic Epistles*, II, 3rd ed., Dublin 1875, pp. 372-3

² e.g. Chaine

that they are able to recall these things when he is gone, and in 3:2 he wants to have them recollect the words spoken by the prophets.

This gives us the purpose of his writing, which we find in chapter 3 but also in chapter 1. There the author insists on his quality of Apostle and on his being a witness of the Transfiguration. By the Transfiguration the prophetic message is made all the more firm and the readers are reminded to be mindful of this prophetic message, paying attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn—until the second coming.

If the above reasoning is valid we must admit that the first and third chapters of our present letter circulated originally as independent notes. This is not in the least to be wondered at; 1:15 would lead us to believe that many such notes or reminders were addressed to the same Church. Chapter 2 of the present epistle may have been another of them. These letters would have been carefully preserved by the Church in question and, dealing with the same topics, might have been put together to form our present epistle at a later period. In this process both the unnecessary salutations and concluding doxologies would have been omitted or displaced. This would have all been done before the formation of the canon, and hence we have no *textual* evidence of originally distinct letters.

The above theory while solving some difficulties falls into others, difficulties it would be idle to deny. The most obvious one is the unity of style noticeable throughout the epistle and more especially the repetitions to which Bigg and Chaine refer. Some of these repetitions are in chapters 1 and 3, which is to be expected if both come from the same writer. The hapaxlegomena are to be found in all three chapters, but are much more numerous in the second.¹ This fact shows that if 2 Peter did borrow from Jude it was not by a mere incorporation of the earlier work into his own letter. He impressed on it his own peculiar personality, style and flair for rare words. The second chapter may have been from the same author as the other two; or all three may have been worked over by a later redactor. To go into such questions, however, would involve a discussion of the authenticity and final redaction of the epistle and as such are beyond the scope of the present article. If we have succeeded in putting forward a case for the reconsideration of the composite character of the epistle we have fulfilled our intention of throwing a little light on a very old and complex problem.

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¹ Chapters 1 and 3 together with 39 verses have 34 hapaxlegomena, whereas chapter 2 with 22 verses has 32.