

ARTICLE IX.

HEBREWS A PETRINE DOCUMENT.¹

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THE wise man said, "Of making many books there is no end"; and the same remark may be extended to the making of many theories concerning the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Perhaps there has not been so great a latitude of conjecture concerning the authorship of any other book in the New Testament canon. The vocabulary, literary style, internal references to persons and conditions, and early tradition have all been pressed hard for testimony concerning the identity of the person who wrote this "word of exhortation." And still there is ample room for further legitimate investigation on this point. Indeed, it would be hard to find, in all the range of New Testament epistolary literature, a better opportunity for the play of one's critical imagination than is found in this Epistle. One might decide on any Christian in the early church who was active between 52 and 95 A.D., and not be dangerously heterodox. If Paul "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God" (1 Tim. i. 1), "by the will of God" (2 Tim. i. 1), "according to the faith of God's elect" (Titus i. 1), did not write the Pastoral Epistles, there are evident forgeries in the opening verses of these Epistles; if Peter did not write the two Epistles which bear his name, some other writer, in attaching the Apostle's name to these Epistles, has committed an unpardonable forgery. But not so with the

¹The quotations in this article from the English text of the New Testament are taken from the American Bible Union Version.

Epistle to the Hebrews; the writer has nowhere given his name, and he has so concealed his identity that no satisfactory solution of the problem has yet been reached.

The names of Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Silas, Clement of Rome, Prisca and Aquila, have each been mentioned in this connection; and it is a significant fact that each of these (with, perhaps, the single exception of Clement of Rome) has his modern scholarly advocate. Stuart, Wordsworth, Ebrard, Delitzsch, and others contend either for a Pauline authorship or for a Lukan authorship under Pauline inspiration; B. Weiss, Renan, Zahn, Salmon, and others hold to the view of Tertullian that the Epistle was written by Barnabas; Pfeiderer, Alford, S. Davidson, Farrar, and Moulton agree with Luther in attributing it to Apollos; Godet and a few German scholars think it was written by Silas, the companion of Paul; Harnack stands alone in the view that it was written by Prisca and Aquila, especially Prisca. But notwithstanding this diversity of conjecture, the only two of the views just mentioned that can make any fair claim to serious consideration are the one that claims a Pauline authorship either direct or through Luke as the editor of Paul, and that which attributes the Epistle to Apollos. There is really so little that can be said in favor of any of the other views that they need not be further considered here.

As for the Apollos hypothesis, it may be admitted that he is "just the kind of man wanted." Our author must have been "versed" (*λόγιος*) and "mighty in the Scriptures" just as Apollos is said to have been (Acts xviii. 24), but there is no reason to suppose that Apollos was the only man of his day that answered to this description. Indeed, what we know of the apostolic leaders proves the contrary. So, in the absence of weightier testimony, we should be slow to ascribe to

him a work to the authorship of which any one of his many contemporaries could make an equally plausible claim.

The tendency of the more recent scholarship is to discredit the Pauline authorship of this Epistle altogether. Bruce says: "That the Apostle [Paul] was not the author of it [Hebrews] is now so generally admitted that it is hardly worth while discussing the question." And it might be added that the strongest objections to a Pauline authorship are equally weighty against a Lukan authorship under Pauline influences. One of the gravest of these objections is that Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, whereas this Epistle was written to Hebrew Christians. Paul says in writing to the Romans: "I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my office" (Rom. xi. 13; cf. Gal. i. 6; Eph. iii. 8; 1 Tim. ii. 7; 2 Tim. i. 11); our author confines his discussion to the relation of the New Covenant to the Old almost as exclusively as if the extension of that Covenant so as to include the Gentiles were a thing entirely unknown to him. This limits, to some extent, the scope of our investigation. We must seek to find our author among that company of apostles, evangelists, and teachers whose work was mainly among Jews or Jewish Christians. Of this company Peter truly holds the place of primacy. He is preëminently the Apostle to the Circumcision. Paul says: "They saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, as Peter was that of the circumcision; for he that wrought for Peter in respect to the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also in respect to the Gentiles" (Gal. ii. 7-8). From a study of the discourses of Peter recorded in Acts it is obvious that he, as well as Apollos, was "versed" and "mighty" in the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures he showed the Jews "that Jesus is the Christ."

To be sure, this question must be studied in the light of the

probable date of the Epistle. If it was written at a date subsequent to the latest recorded events in the life of Peter, further conjecture in this direction would be idle; but if it was written at a date when he was still active, the probability that he is its author is enhanced. According to ancient tradition Peter suffered martyrdom in Rome under Nero about the year 64 A.D., and in this view many modern scholars concur. To say the least, there is no indication that Peter's death occurred at an earlier date. Our starting-point in reckoning the date of this Epistle must be the reference in x. 32 ff. to a "conflict of sufferings" through which the readers had passed in "former days." Is this "conflict of sufferings" to be identified with the persecution under Claudius about the year 52 A.D., or with that under Nero in the year 64 A.D.? In answer to this question it may be noted that the Claudian edict was directed primarily against the Jews; but as the Romans at that early date thought of the Jewish Christians merely as a sect of the Jews, the former suffered with the latter. And it is just such a state of affairs as this that our author alludes to. "But call to mind," he says, "the former days in which, after being enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; on the one hand being made a gazing-stock by reproaches and affliction; and, on the other hand, being made participants with them [the Jews] who were thus treated." This seems almost conclusive evidence that the Claudian persecution is the one here referred to. It is reasonably certain that this persecution did not occur later than the year 52 A.D., twelve years earlier than the date (64 A.D.) assigned to the martyrdom of Peter. So it is chronologically possible for him to have written this Epistle.

We naturally turn to that Epistle which is admittedly from the pen of Peter; namely, the First Epistle of Peter. Com-

paring this Epistle with the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find the following interesting resemblances:—

OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS.

In both Epistles there are copious quotations from the Old Testament (in Hebrews there are thirty-one quotations, in First Peter there are eight); and these quotations are uniformly taken from the LXX version, whereas Paul quotes indiscriminately from the LXX and from the Hebrew original.

PERSONS ADDRESSED.

Both Epistles were written to Hebrew Christians.

1. *Hebrews*.—Although the full title Παύλου τοῦ Ἀποστ. δλου ἢ πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολή found in the Textus Receptus is without good MS. authority, the words Πρὸς Ἑβραίους are found in the three oldest (κ, A, and B) MSS.; and Jülicher says that, toward the close of the second century (a date far anterior to the date of the most ancient MS.), this shorter title is “uncontested, and East and West possess it alike.” Furthermore, the whole line of argument in this Epistle would be inexplicable on any other hypothesis than that the persons addressed not only were more intimately acquainted with Old Testament history and ritual than any Gentile community of that day could have been, but that they had formerly lived in the hope of “perfection” through the old régime, and to that hope they were in danger of returning.

2. *First Peter*.—There seems to be no good reason for giving to *διασπορά* as used in this Epistle (chap. i.), a different meaning from that which it has everywhere else in the New Testament, i.e. members of the Jewish race living outside of Palestine; especially when we take into consideration the five provinces — Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia — here mentioned, from three of which there were Jews at

Jerusalem who heard Peter's great sermon on the day of Pentecost. It would be just like one who would write an epistle to converts from Judaism to show them the relation of Christ to prophecy (as, e.g., First Peter), to write another to persons of like character to show them the relation of Christ to the Old Testament priesthood and system of worship (as, e.g., Hebrews).

HISTORICAL OCCASION.

Both Epistles were written at times when their respective circles of readers were in immediate danger of very great persecution from some power from without the church (*vide* Heb. x. 23 ff.; 1 Peter iv. 1 ff.). No other New Testament Epistle was written under just such circumstances.

VERBAL AFFINITIES.

The following words are common to the two Epistles:—

1. *παρεπίδημος* (Heb. xi. 13; 1 Peter i. 1; ii. 11), used nowhere else in the New Testament.

2. *ῥαντισμός* (Heb. xii. 24; 1 Peter i. 2), found nowhere else in the New Testament, and in both these passages it is used in connection with *αἷμα*.

3. *ἀντίτυπος* (Heb. ix. 24; 1 Peter iii. 21), the only instances of the use of this word in the New Testament; and in both passages there is an express Old Testament reference.

4. *ἔννοια* (Heb. iv. 12; 1 Peter iv. 1) not met with elsewhere in the New Testament.

5. *ποιμήν* with reference to Christ (Heb. xiii. 20; 1 Peter ii. 25; and *ἀρχιποιμήν*, 1 Peter v. 4), the only instances of this usage in the New Testament outside the teaching of Jesus.

6. *ἐπισκοπέω* (Heb. xii. 15; 1 Peter v. 2¹), a verb which is found nowhere else in the New Testament.

¹ Wanting in some MSS.

7. *γεύομαι* with reference to Christian experience (Heb. vi. 4, 5; 1 Peter ii. 3), a usage peculiar to these two Epistles.

PARALLELS IN THOUGHT.

1. Christ exalted above the angels.

HEB. I. 3-4.

Who, when he had made a purification for sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much superior to the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they.

I PETER III. 22.

Who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities, and powers being made subject to him.

2. The finality of Christ's sacrifice.

HEB. IX. 26.

But now once, at the end of the ages, he has been manifested to put away sin through the sacrifice of himself.

I PETER III. 18.

Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in flesh, but made alive in spirit.

3. Christians a building.

HEB. III. 6.

Christ is son over his house; whose house are we if we hold fast the boldness and the glorying of our hope to the end.

I PETER II. 5.

Ye yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house.

Paul presents a similar thought in 1 Cor. iii. 9 and Eph. ii. 21, but he uses *οικοδομή* instead of *οίκος*.

4. Christian service spoken of as the offering of sacrifices.

HEB. XIII. 15.

Through him, therefore, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.

I PETER II. 5.

To be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The language of Paul in Romans xii. 1 does not present a parallel to the thought here. It is true he uses *θυσία* in a sense akin to this, but he uses the verb *παρίστημι*, which is never used of a priestly act.

Apparently grave objections to this view will at once suggest themselves. It will be urged as an objection that the rhetorical structure of the Epistle and its use of "idiomatic and polished" Greek are not the work of the fisherman from Galilee. In reply to this I simply quote the following from Chase's reply to a similar objection to the Petrine authorship of First Peter:—

"In Gallilee, with its Greek towns such as Gadara, there was so considerable an element of Greek life, that even when St. Peter became a follower of Christ, it is unlikely (to say the least) that he was wholly ignorant of colloquial Greek. We may reverently suppose that our Lord, when He chose the apostle as 'the rock on which He would build His church,' discerned in him intellectual as well as spiritual gifts which fitted him for his destined work. In Jerusalem, after the ascension, St. Peter had much intercourse with the Hellenistic Jews. His departure from Palestine can have been no sudden step; and it would be strange if he did not prepare himself for the work which lay before him by using opportunities, which certainly were within his reach, of increasing whatever knowledge he had of the *lingua franca* of the Roman world."

It is true that there is a noticeable difference of style between this Epistle and First Peter, but this is inevitable from the very nature of the case. Although our author designates his work as a "word of exhortation," the larger part of the Epistle is argumentative; and we would naturally expect that even the same author would choose a different style for a work of this character from what he would use in an epistle which is more largely exhortative, as First Peter. And this difference is no greater than that which may be observed between the different groups of the Pauline Epistles; e.g. the much-discussed difference between the Captivity Epistles and the earlier group of First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans.

And again it will be urged against this view that the writer classes himself among those who received the gospel from "those who heard" (ii.3), and not from the Lord himself, and,

consequently, could not be Peter nor any other apostle. But before the argument on this point can be considered closed, account must be taken of the manner in which our author frequently uses the personal pronoun in the first person plural. Westcott mentions three passages (vi. 1; x. 26; xii. 1) in which the author identifies himself with his readers, and one passage (x. 39) in which he "identifies his readers with himself." It is highly probable that the passage alluded to (ii. 3) is another example of the author's identifying himself with his readers, and not a denial of his having seen and heard the Lord.

It appears then that there are no valid objections to a Petrine authorship of this Epistle, while the facts in its favor which I have pointed out form a cumulative evidence which is too weighty to be ignored.