

*THE PLACE OF WRITING AND DESTINATION  
OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.*

To the June number of the *EXPOSITOR* Prof. Ramsay contributed an article on "The Date and Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews," which, it need hardly be said, was fresh and suggestive in the highest degree, like everything that proceeds from his pen. The main conclusions to which the paper pointed were (1) That the Epistle to the Hebrews was the Epistle of the Church at Cæsarea, and was finished during the time of St. Paul's imprisonment there in the spring of A.D. 59; (2) That it embodied the result of the Apostle's discussions with the brethren at Cæsarea, and that St. Paul himself added the closing verses with his own hand; and (3) That it was addressed to the Jewish party of the Church at Jerusalem. No one will deny that, if these propositions can be established with any degree of certainty, we have not only got a highly interesting theory regarding the Epistle's origin, but one which throws light upon many of its most interesting features. And it is indeed largely on the ground of its generally "illuminative" character, rather than upon any direct evidence in support of it, that Prof. Ramsay asks acceptance for his theory. Thus, as he points out, upon this view we have got the gap between the earlier Pauline Epistles and the Epistles of the Roman captivity bridged over by a letter in which St. Paul had an active interest: we have a natural explanation of the wide-spread belief in the early Church that the Epistle, though differing in style and language from St. Paul's admitted Epistles, still owed something to him: and we are enabled, further, to connect the Epistle with what undoubtedly at first sight seems its natural destination, Jerusalem.

A theory combining these advantages is certainly deserv-

ing of the most careful consideration ; and it may well seem presumptuous on the part of the present writer even to attempt to criticise it. At the same time it appears to him that there are certain difficulties connected with the theory, as at present set forth by Prof. Ramsay, that cannot easily be set aside. And it is in the hope of inducing Prof. Ramsay to restate his views in greater detail, and so possibly to dispose of some of these difficulties, that he ventures to draw attention to one or two points.

1. Prof. Ramsay is apparently led to connect the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the first instance, with Cæsarea by the parallelism which, following the Rev. W. M. Lewis, he finds between the topics it discusses, and the thoughts which were present in St. Paul's mind at Cæsarea, as proved, for example, by his address to Agrippa. We cannot reproduce the examples of this connexion here ; but admitting that they afford as striking a parallelism as Prof. Ramsay thinks they do, how can we reconcile them with the still greater differences between our Epistle and the general Pauline teaching ? Mr. Lewis has no difficulty here, for for him these differences do not exist, and he regards the whole Epistle as the reproduction of the Apostle's thoughts in the words of an amanuensis or editor, whom he holds to have been St. Luke. But if this is to attribute, as Prof. Ramsay justly states that it is, too little independent action to the writer, are we not landed in the somewhat anomalous position that the same Epistle which this theory sets out by regarding as embodying "the general impression and outcome" of the discussions which St. Paul held with the leading men of the Church at Cæsarea shows at the same time by its entirely different use of such common Pauline terms as "Faith" and "the Law," that it is moving in a circle of ideas "not contradictory, but complementary to, and yet absolutely different in nature from, Paul's ideas" ? (The EXPOSITOR, June, 1899, p. 420).

We do not say that such a combination is impossible, and "an independent thinking out" by the writer of certain ideas he had derived from St. Paul may go far to explain it; but it seems to us that just in so far as Prof. Ramsay, here separating himself from Mr. Lewis, insists, and rightly insists, upon the marked divergence in the Epistle from general Pauline teaching, he weakens the link by which at the same time he seeks to connect it with Cæsarea.

It may be added that the ideas which Mr. Lewis claims, and Prof. Ramsay approves, as characteristic of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the *later* Pauline Epistles, and which are brought forward to show that St. Paul was thinking at Cæsarea about the same topics that the Epistle discusses, are hardly able to bear the strain put upon them. Thus the headship of Christ over the Church, though undoubtedly most fully developed in the later Pauline Epistles, is by no means confined to them; nor, again, can it well be separated from that mystical union of Christ with the believer which is conspicuously absent from the Epistle to the Hebrews: the use of ἀφεσις, "forgiveness of sins," is, as Prof. Ramsay himself admits, not confined to *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, but is used by St. Paul also in *Acts* xiii. 38, and thrice by St. Peter (*Acts* ii. 38; v. 31; x. 43); and the context of *Colossians* i. 12 finds an analogy not only, as Bishop Lightfoot has pointed out, in *Acts* xxvi. 18, but, according to the same writer, also in an earlier speech of St. Paul's (*Acts* xx. 32).

2. Further objection to Prof. Ramsay's view may, however, be raised not only on such general grounds as we have been stating, but on the interpretation given to certain expressions in the closing verses of the Epistle, which he holds to have been added directly by St. Paul himself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this Prof. Ramsay claims to be following Delitzsch, but we have been unable to find any passage in the latter's Commentary to this effect. On

Thus we are told that it is "not at all improbable that at some time during his long imprisonment Paul expected that the trial would not be longer delayed, and that he would shortly be in Jerusalem" (*ut supra*, p. 418), and that it is to this expectation that he refers when he asks the prayers of the Hebrews, "that I may be restored to you the sooner" (xiii. 19). But to whatever obstacle these words may refer as interposing at the moment between the writer and those whom he is addressing, it can hardly be to imprisonment, in view of the confident declaration of *v.* 23: "Know ye that our brother Timothy hath been set at liberty; <sup>1</sup> with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you." These words are surely the words of a man who not merely "regards it as practically fixed that he is shortly to be in the place where the persons addressed are," but who has, so far at least, freedom of action in bringing this about.<sup>2</sup>

Nor does the mention of Timothy add weight to the argument that this verse was actually written by St. Paul himself, but, strictly interpreted, points rather the other way. For it is an "interesting little point of expression," whose full significance Prof. Ramsay can estimate so well, that the order of the words in the Greek is τὸν ἀδελφὸν

the contrary, Delitzsch distinctly rebuts Ebrard's idea that St. Luke added xiii. 22-25 in his own name on the ground that this passage "has not the nature of a postscript" (*Comm.*, E. Tr. ii. p. 416). According to Riehm (*Lehrbegriff des Hebräerbriefes*, p. 26 note), both Thiersch and Lutterbeck ascribed xiii. 17-25 directly to St. Paul, but he does not state on what grounds. Their view is shared, so far as we can discover, by none of the more recent commentators.

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Ramsay prefers the rendering "has been sent away on a mission" for ἀπολελυμένον (comp. "whom we have sent from us," Tindale, 1526). If so, may it refer, not, as Prof. Ramsay thinks, to a mission in which Timothy was engaged during St. Paul's imprisonment in Cæsarea, but to his work in Asia between the Apostle's first and second Roman imprisonments (comp. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 350)? An additional link to those to be mentioned afterwards is thus established between our Epistle and Rome; for, if Timothy were already known there, the Church would be glad to hear of his proposed return.

<sup>2</sup> It was the difficulty of reconciling *vv.* 19 and 23, and the idea that in order to do so they required different subjects, that led Ebrard to the conjecture mentioned in a previous note (see his *Comm. on Hebrews*, E. Tr., p. 377).

ἡμῶν Τιμόθεον, whereas the order St. Paul invariably adopts is Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός (2 Cor. i. 1; Col. i. 1; 1 Thess. iii. 2; Philem. 1; and comp. Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. xvi. 12; 2 Cor. ii. 13; Phil. ii. 25; Col. iv. 7; and Westcott *in loc.*).

3. There remains still the question of destination, and it is here, we imagine, that Prof. Ramsay's theory will be most eagerly welcomed, for, while it gives expression to the widespread desire to associate on general grounds the Epistle with Jerusalem, it does away with certain of the objections usually urged against that view by substituting the thought of a Jewish part or section of the Church for the Church at large.

Thus we can at least imagine such a section to have been made up of members, none of whom had seen or heard the Lord Himself in accordance with c. ii. 3, and to have furnished no actual martyrs to Christ's cause in accordance with c. xii. 4, statements which can hardly be said to apply to the original Church at Jerusalem. And we can also get over the difficulty of a daughter Church; or, if we are to associate the Epistle with an individual, an Evangelist like Philip the Deacon, venturing to use such terms as c. v. 12, "For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God," if the reference is not to the Mother Church, from which already teachers had been "scattered abroad . . . preaching the word" (*Acts viii. 4*), but to a backward party in it.

At the same time we confess that we find ourselves unable to follow Prof. Ramsay in the argument by which he seeks to connect the Epistle to the Hebrews with Jerusalem, owing to the divergence of views which he finds existing there between the leaders of the Church and the great mass of the congregation, and of which he thinks there is no evidence that it existed anywhere else. For, granting that this divergence did exist at Jerusalem, what evidence have

we that the thought of it was present to the writer of our Epistle? Hardly c. xiii. 24: "Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints," upon which Prof. Ramsay lays such stress. The words certainly imply that a separate body of "leaders" existed, and that the Hebrews were addressed apart from them. But surely no one reading the words dispassionately is led by them to think of an actual difference of opinion as existing between these two bodies, in the absence of other and more specific traces of this in the Epistle. The emphatic repetition of "all . . . all" seems rather to imply that the writer is thinking simply of the existence of *various* leaders and *various* communities to all of whom he desires to send greeting.

If this be admitted, the verse may then be taken as supplying an additional argument that the Epistle was addressed not to Jerusalem, but to Rome, the destination which is at present so widely advocated, especially by German scholars. For the unusual mode of address in *Romans* i. 7, "To all that are in Rome" (instead of "To the Church which is at Rome," comp. *1 Cor.* i. 2; *Gal.* i. 2), and the tendency of the greetings in *Romans* xvi. to fall into groups, both go to prove that the "Church of Rome at this time consisted of a number of such little groups, scattered over the great city, each with its own rendezvous but without any complete and centralized organization."<sup>1</sup>

We are very far indeed from saying that the Roman address is conclusively established on this or the other grounds which are usually brought forward in its favour. But if we think, as we have tried to show elsewhere that we can,<sup>2</sup> not of the great Roman Church with its large admixture of Gentile converts, but of a smaller body of

<sup>1</sup> See Sanday and Headlam, *Comm. on Romans*, p. xxxv.; and comp. Gore, *The Epistle to the Romans*, cc. i.-viii., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (T. and T. Clarke, 1899), p. 49. For Professor Ramsay's kindly references to this book we need hardly say that we are very grateful.

believers, who owed their conversion to imperfectly-instructed teachers, and who had continued to maintain a markedly Jewish type of Christianity,<sup>1</sup> we seem at least brought face to face with a body of readers who were in need of the particular teaching this Epistle supplies. For the more closely the Epistle is studied as a whole, the more clearly, we venture to think, will it be seen that the writer's main purpose is not, as is so often stated, to prevent a threatened apostasy to Judaism, to which from their circumstances the Jerusalem Christians were peculiarly liable, but so to set forth the true meaning and glory of Christianity as to urge those who from their special circumstances were still "babes" in knowledge to a new and higher stage of progress.

Upon this, however, we cannot at present dwell. The purpose of this paper, as we have already stated, is simply to indicate one or two grounds on which Mr. Lewis and Prof. Ramsay's interesting theory seems to us unsatisfactory, more particularly in view of the absence of any direct external evidence in support of it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We may perhaps be allowed to strengthen this view here from two independent quarters:—(1) Prof. Hort, in his *Prolegomena* to the *Romans*, after speaking of the firm footing Pauline Christianity had apparently established in Rome previous to the writing of the Epistle, adds, "it is probable, rather on general grounds than on definite historical evidence, that Jewish types of Christianity, one or more, had likewise their representatives" (p. 18). (2) In *The Expository Times*, x. p. 422, Prof. Nestle adverts to the same possible connexion between our Epistle and the *συναγωγή Αἰβρίων* at Rome, which, following a hint of Bishop Westcott's, we suggested in the book already referred to (*Theol. of the Ep. to the Hebrews*, p. 50).

<sup>2</sup> It may be noted that Ewald had already thought on different grounds of Cæsarea as the place of writing of the Epistle; see his *Das Sendschreiben a. d. Hebräer*, p. 8.