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*THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE TO THE  
HEBREWS.*

[In this article the contractions *á. λ.* and *á. λλ.* are used to save space, and, unless otherwise stated, are to be taken as meaning that the word or words thus marked are limited, not absolutely to the books in which they are found, but to these books within the New Testament, and without considering the question of their occurrence once or more than once within these limits.]

IN approaching the question as to the authorship of the great anonymous Epistle (which is unique not only in its anonymity, but also in its position as the only systematic theological treatise in the New Testament) one feels oneself embarrassed by many difficulties. Through the very age of the lock the key seems to have rusted in the wards. There is nothing approaching to a consensus of either ancient tradition or modern criticism on the subject.

To sum up briefly the results of ancient and modern inquiry, we may say that this great Epistle has been assigned to five different authors: S. Paul, S. Barnabas, S. Clement, S. Luke, and Apollos. There is no one else whose claim to the authorship is worthy of the slightest consideration. And it is more likely that the author was some one of these five than some "great Unknown," who left this great impression on Apostolic or sub-Apostolic theology, and no other mark whatsoever.

On close examination three of these claims vanish. The claims of Apollos seem to rest on a mere guess of Luther's, apparently based on the facts that Apollos was eloquent and learned in the Scriptures, qualities by no means unique in the Apostolic age. The claims of Barnabas and Clement seem to rest solely on certain resemblances between *Hebrews* and epistles written by or attributed to these authors. But these resemblances are purely on the surface, and seem to me to suggest simply an acquaintance with our epistle on

the part of these writers. This, joined to a dissimilarity of thought that is deeper and stronger than the resemblances, is actually an argument against *Hebrews* having come from either of these sources.<sup>1</sup>

Two names remain, those of S. Paul and S. Luke. Is there any good ground for attributing the Epistle to either?

It is unnecessary to dwell at any length on the arguments for the Pauline authorship. We may grant that the style is in some respects like S. Paul's; that the vocabulary resembles his vocabulary; that, like S. Paul (and to a greater degree), the author has a peculiar affection for active verbal substantives; that the "Hymn of Faith" reminds one of a well known passage in the Epistle to the Romans; that a curious misquotation, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," is common to *Romans* and *Hebrews*; that *Hebrews* has the Pauline peculiarity of division into two sections, the first theological and the second practical; and that the concluding section is couched—as Canon Ashwell<sup>2</sup> points out—in a form that S. Paul seems (2 *Thess.* iii. 17) to claim as peculiarly his own.

But against these points must be set certain plain facts. The dissimilarity of style between the books admitted to be Pauline and *Hebrews* is at least as strong as the resemblance—S. Paul's vocabulary was subject to outside influences—and the vocabulary of *Hebrews* has marked pecu-

<sup>1</sup> The "Epistle of Barnabas" is a wild and exaggerated piece of typology, which (it has been said) "makes the Old Testament a riddle, and the New Testament its answer." One may be excused for using the "Lemprière Hypothesis," and suggesting that there were probably two persons of the name! There is no evidence that the genuine S. Barnabas was in any way connected with the writing of *Hebrews*. S. Clement's Epistle, on the other hand, deals with "Faith and Hospitality," in a manner that distinctly suggests acquaintance with the persons or writings of S. Paul and S. Peter—an interesting point when taken in connexion with Professor Ramsay's views as to the Petrine Episcopate at Rome and of the connexion of S. Clement with that see.

<sup>2</sup> S.P.C.K. Commentary.

liarities of its own. S. Paul is by no means alone in his love of active verbals. "Faith" means one thing in the Epistle to the Romans and quite another in our Epistle. We all know that quotations are frequently current in inaccurate forms.<sup>1</sup> The division of an epistle into theological and doctrinal sections is eminently natural and eminently useful; it is as strongly marked in 1 *Peter* (which, by the way, has a distinct resemblance to *Hebrews*) as in any Epistle of S. Paul's. Finally, Canon Ashwell's argument presupposes a circulation of the Pauline writings that seems improbable at so early a period, and it ignores the fact that the word *χάρις* (the supposed hall-mark of Pauline authorship) is at least as characteristic of S. Luke and of the Petrine Epistles.

And the case against the Pauline authorship seems unanswerable. The anonymity is remarkable—all the more so because its adoption was obviously not intended to conceal the personality of the author. S. Paul could not have described himself as simply a learner from those who had heard our Lord. S. Paul was a Stoic, naturally, being a Pharisee; he not only gives us Stoic thought, but conveys it in the technical language of the Porch. But the author of our Epistle (as I think I have fully proved in an article in *Hermathena*) was distinctly a Platonist. Finally, the Epistle can hardly have been written during the lifetime of S. Paul. It is true that the writer always uses the present tense in speaking of the Jewish worship; but, on the other

<sup>1</sup> In quoting the line of Borbonius,

"Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis,"

many reverse the position of "nos" and "et," and a still larger number of persons substitute "Tempora" for "Omnia." Cowper's line,

"The cups that cheer and not inebriate,"

is frequently quoted in the form,

"The cup that cheers but not inebriates."

Would any sane critic consider that the presence of the incorrect forms of either of these quotations in two books was any proof of community of authorship?

hand, the worship alluded to is always that of the Tabernacle. Thus the present tense describes an ideal, historical present; and the whole tone of thought in our Epistle makes it highly improbable that it was written until some years after the death of S. Paul.

Of the five names mentioned one remains—that of S. Luke. Is there any distinct and positive evidence to support the view, already suggested by a dialectic and negative process, that this great treatise came from his pen? To clear the ground, let us notice two or three points at starting.

First, several of the arguments used in favour of the Pauline authorship are quite as strongly in favour of S. Luke. There is a resemblance between their styles and their vocabularies. Both are particularly fond of active verbals. Both abound in *ἀ. λλ.*, and these *ἀ. λλ.* are notably present among their active verbals.

Secondly, we have seen that there are special reasons which make it practically impossible to refer the Epistle to the Hebrews to S. Paul. Now, none of these objections applies to S. Luke. He has written other books—anonymously; elsewhere he definitely describes himself as a learner from others; there is no ground for believing him to have been a Pharisee, or in any way imbued with Stoicism.

From these two considerations we see that *all such arguments for the Pauline authorship of an Epistle as may also be applied to S. Luke become arguments for the Lucan authorship, since they are not affected, in his case, by the objections that make it impossible to apply them to S. Paul.*

Thirdly, we have a consideration that cannot be omitted, though its use lies not so much in its direct evidential value as in the help it gives us in confirming conclusions reached in other ways. S. Paul was subject to influences outside his own special personality—the influence of his

companions, the influence of his scribes. Among his scribes and companions we must reckon S. Luke. S. Luke, again, was subject to varying influences—the Synoptic tradition, the other sources from which he obtained information as to the *individual* parts of his Gospel, which, by the way, form more than half of its contents. Now, we are justified in supposing that when S. Paul was most likely to be affected by the personal influence of S. Luke he would show the strongest traces of Lucan peculiarities, and also that when S. Luke was working either without documents or with documents that were not written in Greek he would show us most strongly his individuality of style. Bearing this in mind, there are a few points that will repay careful consideration. (1) Among S. Paul's acknowledged writings there is one holograph—the Epistle to the Galatians. It shows hardly a trace of the peculiarities common to S. Paul and S. Luke. Notably, it is remarkably deficient in active verbal substantives, and does not contain a single word of this class that is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. (2) So, too, the most individual portion of S. Luke's Gospel is the section immediately following the Introduction—the Gospel of the Childhood. Here his authorities were obviously Aramaic, so we might naturally expect that the Greek would show his peculiar style most markedly. Now, in no part of the Third Gospel or *Acts* do we find so many active verbals as in this particular section. So far, then, we have grounds for believing that the lavish use of active verbals in S. Paul's Epistles was probably due to the influence of S. Luke; and, as words of this class are more numerous in *Hebrews* than in any Pauline document, this deduction is obviously of some value in determining the authorship of our Epistle. So, too, there are other peculiarities common to S. Paul and S. Luke—such as the use of distinctively medical words—that can be best explained by supposing them to be due

to the influence of the latter writer. If these peculiarities also abound in *Hebrews*, surely this fact indicates S. Luke as the writer rather than his greater friend and companion, S. Paul.

Fourthly, we can to a certain extent find out at least the *minimum* limit of S. Luke's influence in the New Testament. When 1 *Timothy* was written he was S. Paul's sole companion, and there seems reason to believe that he was with S. Paul during the writing of all three Pastoral Epistles. He sends a greeting to the Colossians. There seems good reason to believe that he was present during the writing of 2 *Corinthians*. 1 *Peter* (almost certainly a translation) has a remarkable resemblance to his style. The Greek of 2 *Peter* is grammatically sound, but barbarous in phraseology; it is however sufficiently like the good Greek of 1 *Peter* and of S. Luke in general to suggest that the writer took as his style that of S. Luke. There is, in fact, sufficient ground for believing that these books—*Colossians*, 2 *Corinthians*, the Pastoral Epistles, *First* (and, to a lesser extent, *Second*) *Peter*,—possess a Lucan character, to justify us in treating them as "Secondary Lucan works," and in using them as a help in determining the authorship of *Hebrews*.

For the present, however, it will be sufficient to examine our Epistle simply in connexion with the acknowledged Lucan writings—the Third Gospel and *Acts*.

Now these two books have certain remarkable peculiarities. They abound in *ἀ. λλ.*; they have a large common vocabulary; they are specially strong in active verbals, many of which occur once only; and their individually or collectively peculiar words can be largely traced to the same sources. Speaking generally, we may say that they contain in their vocabulary a large and peculiar element of philosophical, medical, and—to a less extent—technical legal terms; and we may add that these terms show a dis-

tinct acquaintance with a special series of books, with the writings of Plato, Aristotle's *Physics* and *Ethics*, Hippocrates and other medical authorities, and also with Thucydides, Polybius, Theophrastus, Diodorus Siculus, and the Greek Tragedians. Aristophanes has also left his mark on the vocabulary, and there seems evidence that Philo and Plutarch drew from much the same sources. There are also clear traces of the influence of the LXX. and the Apocrypha. *En passant*, I may observe that the books which I have named "Secondary Lucan" show clear signs of the same influences. If, however, we can show a strong parallelism simply between the Epistle to the Hebrews and the two acknowledged works of S. Luke, we shall have done something towards determining the authorship of our Epistle.

ALEX. R. EAGAR.

*(To be continued.)*