

THE INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY

A CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL  
COMMENTARY

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

BY

JAMES MOFFATT  
D.D., D.Litt., Hon. M.A. (Oxon.)

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COMMENTARY

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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TO THE MEMORY OF

THREE SCOTTISH EXPOSITORS OF  $\Pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$   $\epsilon\beta\pi\alpha\iota\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ :

A. B. BRUCE,

A. B. DAVIDSON,

AND

MARCUS DODS.



## PREFACE.

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IT is ten years since this edition was first drafted. Various interruptions, of war and peace, have prevented me from finishing it till now, and I am bound to acknowledge the courtesy and patience of the editor and the publishers. During the ten years a number of valuable contributions to the subject have appeared. Of these as well as of their predecessors I have endeavoured to take account; if I have not referred to them often, this has been due to no lack of appreciation, but simply because, in order to be concise and readable, I have found it necessary to abstain from offering any catena of opinions in this edition. The one justification for issuing another edition of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* seemed to me to lie in a fresh point of view, expounded in the notes—fresh, that is, in an English edition. I am more convinced than ever that the criticism of this writing cannot hope to make any positive advance except from two negative conclusions. One is, that the identity of the author and of his readers must be left in the mist where they already lay at the beginning of the second century when the guess-work, which is honoured as “tradition,” began. The other is, that the situation which called forth this remarkable piece of primitive Christian thought had nothing to do with any movement in contemporary Judaism. The writer of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* knew no Hebrew, and his readers were in no sense *Ἑβραῖοι*. These may sound paradoxes. I agree with those who think they are axioms. At any

rate such is the point of view from which the present edition has been written ; it will explain why, for example, in the Introduction there is so comparatively small space devoted to the stock questions about authorship and date.

One special reason for the delay in issuing the book has been the need of working through the materials supplied for the criticism of the text by von Soden's *Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (1913) and by some subsequent discoveries, and also the need of making a first-hand study of the Wisdom literature of Hellenistic Judaism as well as of Philo. Further, I did not feel justified in annotating *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* without reading through the scattered ethical and philosophical tracts and treatises of the general period, like the *De Mundo* and the remains of Teles and Musonius Rufus.

"A commentary," as Dr. Johnson observed, "must arise from the fortuitous discoveries of many men in devious walks of literature." No one can leave the criticism of a work like *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* after twelve years spent upon it, without feeling deeply indebted to such writers as Chrysostom, Calvin, Bleek, Riehm, and Riggenbach, who have directly handled it. But I owe much to some eighteenth-century writings, like L. C. Valckenaer's *Scholía* and G. D. Kypke's *Observationes Sacrae*, as well as to other scholars who have lit up special points of interpretation indirectly. Where the critical data had been already gathered in fairly complete form, I have tried to exercise an independent judgment ; also I hope some fresh ground has been broken here and there in ascertaining and illustrating the text of this early Christian masterpiece.

JAMES MOFFATT.

GLASGOW, 15th February 1924.

# INTRODUCTION.

## § I. ORIGIN AND AIM.

### (i.)

DURING the last quarter of the first century A.D. a little masterpiece of religious thought began to circulate among some of the Christian communities. The earliest trace of it appears towards the end of the century, in a pastoral letter sent by the church of Rome to the church of Corinth. The authorship of this letter is traditionally assigned to a certain Clement, who probably composed it about the last decade of the century. Evidently he knew *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* (as we may, for the sake of convenience, call our writing); there are several almost verbal reminiscences (cp. Dr. A. J. Carlyle in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 44 f., where the evidence is sifted). This is beyond dispute, and proves that our writing was known at Rome during the last quarter of the first century. A fair specimen of the indebtedness of Clement to our epistle may be seen in a passage like the following, where I have underlined the allusions:

36<sup>2-5</sup> ὅς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς μεγαλωσύνης αὐτοῦ, τοσούτῳ μείζων  
ἐστὶν ἀγγέλων, ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον ὄνομα κεκληρονό-  
μηκεν· γέγραπται γὰρ οὕτως·

ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα  
καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα.

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ νῷ αὐτοῦ οὕτως εἶπεν ὁ δεσπότης·

νῖός μου εἶ σύ,  
ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε·

αἰτῆσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ, καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν  
σου καὶ τὴν κατάσχεσίν σου τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς.  
καὶ πάλιν λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν·

κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου,  
ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου.

τινες οὖν οἱ ἐχθροί; οἱ φαῦλοι καὶ ἀντιτασσόμενοι τῷ  
θελήματι αὐτοῦ.

To this we may add a sentence from what precedes :

36<sup>1</sup> Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν ἀρχιερέα τῶν προσφορῶν ἡμῶν, τὸν προστάτην καὶ βοηθὸν τῆς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν. 2<sup>18</sup> δύναται τοῖς πειραζομένοις βοηθῆσαι. . . . 3<sup>1</sup> κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν.

The same phrase occurs twice in later doxologies, διὰ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως καὶ προστάτου (τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν, 61<sup>3</sup>) (ἡμῶν, 64<sup>1</sup>) Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. There is no convincing proof that Ignatius or Polykarp used Πρὸς Ἑβραίους, but the so-called Epistle of Barnabas contains some traces of it (e.g. in 4<sup>9f.</sup> 5<sup>5, 6</sup> and 6<sup>17-19</sup>). Barnabas is a second-rate interpretation of the OT ceremonial system, partly on allegorical lines, to warn Christians against having anything to do with Judaism; its motto might be taken from 3<sup>6</sup> ἵνα μὴ προσηρσώμεθα ὡς προσήλυτοι (v.l. ἐπήλυτοι) τῷ ἐκείνων νόμῳ. In the homily called 2 Clement our writing is freely employed, e.g. in

11<sup>6</sup> ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ διψυχῶμεν, ἀλλὰ ἐλπίσαντες ὑπομείνωμεν, ἵνα καὶ τὸν μισθὸν κομισώμεθα. πιστὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος τὰς ἀντιμισθίας ἀποδιδόναι ἐκάστῳ ἔργων αὐτοῦ.

1<sup>6</sup> ἀποθέμενοι ἐκείνο ὃ περικείμεθα νέφος τῇ αὐτοῦ θελήσει.

16<sup>4</sup> προσευχῇ δὲ ἐκ καλῆς συνειδήσεως.

10<sup>23</sup> κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλήνῃ, πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος.

12<sup>1</sup> τοσοῦτον ἔχοντες περικείμενον ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων, ὅγκον ἀποθέμενοι πάντα.

13<sup>18</sup> προσεύχεσθε περὶ ἡμῶν· πειθόμεθα γὰρ ὅτι καλὴν συνείδησιν ἔχομεν.

"It seems difficult, in view of the verbal coincidences, to resist the conclusion that the language of 2 Clement is unconsciously influenced by that of Hebrews" (Dr. A. J. Carlyle in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, p. 126). As 2 Clement is, in all likelihood, a product either of the Roman or of the Alexandrian church, where Πρὸς Ἑβραίους was early appreciated, this becomes doubly probable.

There is no reason why Justin Martyr, who had lived at Rome, should not have known it; but the evidence for his use of it (see on 3<sup>1</sup> 11<sup>4</sup> etc.) is barely beyond dispute. Hermas, however, knew it; the *Shepherd* shows repeated traces of it (cf. Zahn's edition, pp. 439 f.). It was read in the North African church, as Tertullian's allusion proves (see p. xvii), and with particular interest in the Alexandrian church, even before Clement

wrote (cp. p. xviii). Clement's use of it is unmistakable, though he does not show any sympathy with its ideas about sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> Naturally a thinker like Marcion ignored it, though why it shared with First Peter the fate of exclusion from the Muratorian canon is inexplicable. However, the evidence of the second century upon the whole is sufficient to show that it was being widely circulated and appreciated as an edifying religious treatise, canonical or not.

## (ii.)

By this time it had received the title of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους*. Whatever doubts there were about the authorship, the writing never went under any title except this in the later church; which proves that, though not original, the title must be early. *Ἑβραῖοι*<sup>2</sup> was intended to mean Jewish Christians. Those who affixed this title had no idea of its original destination; otherwise they would have chosen a local term, for the writing is obviously intended for a special community. They were struck by the interest of the writing in the OT sacrifices and priests, however, and imagined in a superficial way that it must have been addressed to Jewish Christians. *Ἑβραῖοι* was still an archaic equivalent for *Ἰουδαῖοι*; and those who called our writing *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* must have imagined that it had been originally meant for Jewish (*i.e.* Hebrew-speaking) Christians in Palestine, or, in a broader sense, for Christians who had been born in Judaism. The latter is more probable. Where the title originated we cannot say; the corresponding description of 1 Peter as *ad gentes* originated in the Western church, but *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* is common both to the Western and the Eastern churches. The very fact that so vague and misleading a title was added, proves that by the second century all traces of the original destination of the writing had been lost. It is, like the *Ad Familiares* of Cicero's correspondence, one of the erroneous titles in ancient literature, "hardly more than a reflection of the impression produced on an early copyist" (W. Robertson Smith). The reason why the original destination had been lost sight of, was probably the fact that it was a small household church—not one of the great churches, but a more limited circle, which may have become merged in the larger local church as time went on. Had it been sent, for example, to any large church like that at Rome or Alexandria, there would have been neither the need

<sup>1</sup> Cp. R. B. Tollington's *Clement of Alexandria*, vol. ii. pp. 225 f.

<sup>2</sup> It is quite impossible to regard it as original, in an allegorical sense, as though the writer, like Philo, regarded *ὁ Ἑβραῖος* as the typical believer who, a second Abraham, migrated or crossed from the sensuous to the spiritual world. The writer never alludes to Abraham in this connexion; indeed he never uses *Ἑβραῖος* at all.



nor the opportunity for changing the title to Πρὸς Ἑβραίους. Our writing is not a manifesto to Jewish Christians in general, or to Palestinian Jewish Christians, as πρὸς Ἑβραίους would imply; indeed it is not addressed to Jewish Christians at all. Whoever were its original readers, they belonged to a definite, local group or circle. That is the first inference from the writing itself; the second is, that they were not specifically Jewish Christians. The canonical title has had an unfortunate influence upon the interpretation of the writing (an influence which is still felt in some quarters). It has been responsible for the idea, expressed in a variety of forms, that the writer is addressing Jewish Christians in Palestine or elsewhere who were tempted, e.g., by the war of A.D. 66-70, to fall back into Judaism; and even those who cannot share this view sometimes regard the readers as swayed by some hereditary associations with their old faith, tempted by the fascinations of a ritual, outward system of religion, to give up the spiritual messianism of the church. All such interpretations are beside the point. The writer never mentions Jews or Christians. He views his readers without any distinction of this kind; to him they are in danger of relapsing, but there is not a suggestion that the relapse is into Judaism, or that he is trying to wean them from a preoccupation with Jewish religion. He never refers to the temple, any more than to circumcision. It is the tabernacle of the pentateuch which interests him, and all his knowledge of the Jewish ritual is gained from the LXX and later tradition. The LXX is for him and his readers the codex of their religion, the appeal to which was cogent, for Gentile Christians, in the early church. As Christians, his readers accepted the LXX as their bible. It was superfluous to argue for it; he could argue from it, as Paul had done, as a writer like Clement of Rome did afterwards. How much the LXX meant to Gentile Christians, may be seen in the case of a man like Tatian, for example, who explicitly declares that he owed to reading of the OT his conversion to Christianity (*Ad Graecos*, 29). It is true that our author, in arguing that Christ had to suffer, does not appeal to the LXX. But this is an idiosyncrasy, which does not affect the vital significance of the LXX prophecies. The Christians to whom he was writing had learned to appreciate their LXX as an authority, by their membership in the church. Their danger was not an undervaluing of the LXX as authoritative; it was a moral and mental danger, which the writer seeks to meet by showing how great their religion was intrinsically. This he could only do ultimately by assuming that they admitted the appeal to their bible, just as they admitted the divine Sonship of Jesus. There may have been Christians of Jewish birth among his readers; but he addresses

his circle, irrespective of their origin, as all members of the People of God, who accept the Book of God. The writing, in short, might have been called *ad gentes* as aptly as First Peter, which also describes Gentile Christians as ὁ λαός, the People (cp. on 2<sup>17</sup>). The readers were not in doubt of their religion. Its basis was unquestioned. What the trouble was, in their case, was no theoretical doubt about the codex or the contents of Christianity, but a practical failure to be loyal to their principles, which the writer seeks to meet by recalling them to the full meaning and responsibility of their faith; naturally he takes them to the common ground of the sacred LXX.

We touch here the question of the writer's aim. But, before discussing this, a word must be said about the authorship.

Had Πρὸς Ἑβραίους been addressed to Jews, the title would have been intelligible. Not only was there a [συνα]γωγή Ἑβραίων at Corinth (cp. Deissmann's *Light from the East*, pp. 13, 14), but a συναγωγή Αἰβρέων at Rome (cp. Schürer's *Geschichte des Jüd. Volkes*<sup>3</sup>, iii. 46). Among the Jewish συναγωγαι mentioned in the Roman epitaphs (cp. N. Müller's *Die jüdische Katakomba am Monte Verde zu Rom* . . ., Leipzig, 1912, pp. 110f.), there is one of Ἑβραίοι, which Müller explains as in contrast to the synagogue of "vernaculorum" (Βερνάκλοι, βερνακλήσιοι, i.e. resident Jews as opposed to immigrants; though it seems truer, with E. Bormann (*Wiener Studien*, 1912, pp. 383f.), to think of some Kultgemeinde which adhered to the use of Hebrew, or which, at any rate, was of Palestinian origin or connexion.

### (iii.)

The knowledge of who the author was must have disappeared as soon as the knowledge of what the church was, for whom he wrote. Who wrote Πρὸς Ἑβραίους? We know as little of this as we do of the authorship of *The Whole Duty of Man*, that seventeenth-century classic of English piety. Conjectures sprang up, early in the second century, but by that time men were no wiser than we are. The mere fact that some said Barnabas, some Paul, proves that the writing had been circulating among the *adespota*. It was perhaps natural that our writing should be assigned to Barnabas, who, as a Levite, might be supposed to take a special interest in the ritual of the temple—the very reason which led to his association with the later Epistle of Barnabas. Also, he was called υἱὸς παρακλήσεως (Ac 4<sup>36</sup>), which seemed to tally with He 13<sup>22</sup> (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως), just as the allusion to "beloved" in Ps 127<sup>2</sup> (= 2 S 12<sup>24f.</sup>) was made to justify the attribution of the psalm to king Solomon. The difficulty about applying 2<sup>3</sup> to a man like Barnabas was overlooked, and in North Africa, at any rate, the (Roman?) tradition of his authorship prevailed, as Tertullian's words in *de pudicitia* 20 show: "volo ex redundantia alicuius etiam comitis apostolorum testimonium superinducere, idoneum

conferendi de proximo jure disciplinam magistrorum. Extat enim et Barnabae titulus ad Hebraeos, adeo satis auctoritati viri, ut quem Paulus juxta se constituerit in abstinenciae tenore: 'aut ego solus et Barnabas non habemus hoc operandi potestatem?' (1 Co 9<sup>6</sup>). Et utique receptior apud ecclesias epistola Barnabae illo apocrypho Pastore moechorum. Monens itaque discipulos, omissis omnibus initiis, ad perfectionem magis tendere," etc. (quoting He 6<sup>4f</sup>). What appeals to Tertullian in Πρὸς Ἑβραίους is its uncompromising denial of any second repentance. His increasing sympathy with the Montanists had led him to take a much less favourable view of the *Shepherd* of Hermas than he had once entertained; he now contrasts its lax tone with the rigour of Πρὸς Ἑβραίους, and seeks to buttress his argument on this point by insisting as much as he can on the authority of Πρὸς Ἑβραίους as a production of the apostolic Barnabas. Where this tradition originated we cannot tell. Tertullian refers to it as a fact, not as an oral tradition; he may have known some MS of the writing with the title Βαρνάβα πρὸς Ἑβραίους (ἐπιστολή), and this may have come from Montanist circles in Asia Minor, as Zahn suggests. But all this is guessing in the dark about a guess in the dark.

Since Paul was the most considerable letter-writer of the primitive church, it was natural that in some quarters this anonymous writing should be assigned to him, as was done apparently in the Alexandrian church, although even there scholarly readers felt qualms at an early period, and endeavoured to explain the idiosyncrasies of style by supposing that some disciple of Paul, like Luke, translated it from Hebrew into Greek. This Alexandrian tradition of Paul's authorship was evidently criticized in other quarters, and the controversy drew from Origen the one piece of enlightened literary criticism which the early discussions produced. "Ὅτι ὁ χαρακτήρ τῆς λέξεως τῆς πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐπιγεγραμμένης ἐπιστολῆς οὐκ ἔχει τὸ ἐν λόγῳ ἰδιωτικὸν τοῦ ἀποστόλου, ὁμολογήσαντος ἑαυτὸν ἰδιώτην εἶναι τῷ λόγῳ (2 Co 11<sup>6</sup>), τουτέστι τῇ φράσει, ἀλλὰ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπιστολὴ συνθέσει τῆς λέξεως Ἑλληνικώτερα, πᾶς ὁ ἐπιστάμενος κρίνειν φράσεων διαφορὰς ὁμολογήσαι ἂν. πάλιν τε αὖ ὅτι τὰ νοήματα τῆς ἐπιστολῆς θαυμάσιά ἐστι, καὶ οὐ δεύτερα τῶν ἀποστολικῶν ὁμολογουμένων γραμμάτων, καὶ τοῦτο ἂν συμφέσαι εἶναι ἀληθὲς πᾶς ὁ προσέχων τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῇ ἀποστολικῇ. . . . Ἐγὼ δὲ ἀποφαινόμενος εἶποιμ' ἂν ὅτι τὰ μὲν νοήματα τοῦ ἀποστόλου ἐστίν, ἡ δὲ φράσις καὶ ἡ σύνθεσις ἀπομνημονεύσαντός τινος τὰ ἀποστολικά, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐσχολογραφῆσαντός τινος τὰ εἰρημένα ὑπὸ τοῦ διδασκάλου. εἴ τις οὖν ἐκκλησία ἔχει ταύτην τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ὡς Παύλου, αὕτη εὐδοκίμειτω καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ. οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἄνδρες ὡς Παύλου αὐτὴν παραδεδώκασι, τίς δὲ ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς

θεὸς οἶδεν (quoted by Eusebius, *H.E.* vi. 25. 11-14).<sup>1</sup> Origen is too good a scholar to notice the guess that it was a translation from Hebrew, but he adds, ἡ δὲ εἰς ἡμᾶς φθάσασα ἱστορία, ὑπὸ τινων μὲν λεγόντων, ὅτι Κλήμης ὁ γενόμενος ἐπίσκοπος Ῥωμαίων ἔγραψε τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, ὑπὸ τινων δὲ ὅτι Λουκᾶς ὁ γράψας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ τὰς Πράξεις. The idea that Clement of Rome wrote it was, of course, an erroneous deduction from the echoes of it in his pages, almost as unfounded as the notion that Luke wrote it, either independently or as an amanuensis of Paul—a view probably due ultimately to the explanation of how his gospel came to be an apostolic, canonical work. Origen yields more to the “Pauline” interpretation of Πρὸς Ἑβραίους than is legitimate; but, like Erasmus at a later day,<sup>2</sup> he was living in an environment where the “Pauline” tradition was almost a note of orthodoxy. Even his slight scruples failed to keep the question open. In the Eastern church, any hesitation soon passed away, and the scholarly scruples of men like Clement of Alexandria and Origen made no impression on the church at large. It is significant, for example, that when even Eusebius comes to give his own opinion (*H.E.* iii. 38. 2), he alters the hypothesis about Clement of Rome, and makes him merely the translator of a Pauline Hebrew original, not the author of a Greek original. As a rule, however, Πρὸς Ἑβραίους was accepted as fully Pauline, and passed into the NT canon of the Asiatic, the Egyptian, and the Syriac churches without question. In the Syriac canon of A.D. 400 (text as in Souter’s *Text and Canon of NT*, p. 226), indeed, it stands next to Romans in the list of Paul’s epistles (see below, § 4). Euthalius, it is true, about the middle of the fifth century, argues for it in a way that indicates a current of opposition still flowing in certain quarters, but ecclesiastically Πρὸς Ἑβραίους in the East as a Pauline document could defy doubts. The firm conviction of the Eastern church as a whole comes out in a remark like that of Apollinarius the bishop of Laodicea, towards the close of the fourth century: ποῦ γέγραπται ὅτι χαρακτήρ ἐστι τῆς ὑποστάσεως ὁ υἱός; παρὰ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ Παύλῳ ἐν τῇ πρὸς Ἑβραίους. Οὐκ ἐκκλησιάζεται. Ἀφ’ οὗ κατηγγέλη τὸ εὐαγγέλιον Χριστοῦ, Παύλου εἶναι πεπίστευται ἢ ἐπιστολῇ (*Dial. de sancta Trin.* 922).

It was otherwise in the Western church, where Πρὸς Ἑβραίους was for long either read simply as an edifying treatise, or, if regarded as canonical, assigned to some anonymous apostolic

<sup>1</sup> There is a parallel to the last words in the scoffing close of an epigram in the Greek Anthology (ix. 135): γράψε τις; οἶδε θεός· τίνας εἵνεκεν; οἶδε καὶ αὐτός.

<sup>2</sup> “Ut a stilo Pauli, quod ad phrasin attinet, longe lateque discrepat, ita ad spiritum ac pectus Paulinum vehementer accedit.”

writer rather than to Paul. Possibly the use made of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* by the Montanists and the Novatians, who welcomed its denial of a second repentance, compromised it in certain quarters. Besides, the Roman church had never accepted the Alexandrian tradition of Paul's authorship. Hence, even when, on its merits, it was admitted to the canon, there was a strong tendency to treat it as anonymous, as may be seen, for example, in Augustine's references. Once in the canon, however, it gradually acquired a Pauline prestige, and, as Greek scholarship faded, any scruples to the contrary became less and less intelligible. It was not till the study of Greek revived again, at the dawn of the Reformation, that the question was reopened.

The data in connexion with the early fortunes of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* in church history belong to text-books on the Canon, like Zahn's *Geschichte d. NT Kanons*, i. 283 f., 577 f., ii. 160 f., 358 f.; Leipoldt's *Geschichte d. NT Kanons*, i. pp. 188 f., 219 f.; and Jacquier's *Le Nouveau Testament dans L'Eglise Chrétienne*, i. (1911).

Few characters mentioned in the NT have escaped the attention of those who have desired in later days to identify the author of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους*. Apollos, Peter, Philip, Silvanus, and even Prisca have been suggested, besides Aristion, the alleged author of Mk 16<sup>9-20</sup>. I have summarized these views elsewhere (*Introd. to Lit. of NT*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 438-442), and it is superfluous here to discuss hypotheses which are in the main due to an irrepressible desire to construct NT romances. Perhaps our modern pride resents being baffled by an ancient document, but it is better to admit that we are not yet wiser on this matter than Origen was, seventeen centuries ago. The author of *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* cannot be identified with any figure known to us in the primitive Christian tradition. He left great prose to some little clan of early Christians, but who they were and who he was, *τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς θεὸς οἶδεν*. To us he is a voice and no more. The theory which alone explains the conflicting traditions is that for a time the writing was circulated as an anonymous tract. Only on this hypothesis can the simultaneous emergence of the Barnabas and the Paul traditions in different quarters be explained, as well as the persistent tradition in the Roman church that it was anonymous. As Zahn sensibly concludes, "those into whose hands *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* came either looked upon it as an anonymous writing from ancient apostolic times, or else resorted to conjecture. If Paul did not write it, they thought, then it must have been composed by some other prominent teacher of the apostolic church. Barnabas was such a man." In one sense, it was fortunate that the Pauline hypothesis prevailed so early and so extensively, for apart from



this help it might have been difficult for  $\Pi\rho\acute{o}s\ \text{'}\text{Εβραίους}$  to win or to retain its place in the canon. But even when it had been lodged securely inside the canon, some Western churchmen still clung for a while to the old tradition of its anonymity,<sup>1</sup> although they could do no more than hold this as a pious opinion. The later church was right in assigning  $\Pi\rho\acute{o}s\ \text{'}\text{Εβραίους}$  a canonical position. The original reasons might be erroneous or doubtful, but even in the Western church, where they continued to be questioned, there was an increasing indisposition to challenge their canonical result.

## (iv.)

Thrown back, in the absence of any reliable tradition, upon the internal evidence, we can only conclude that the writer was one of those personalities in whom the primitive church was more rich than we sometimes realize. "Si l'on a pu comparer saint Paul à Luther," says Ménégoz, "nous comparerions volontiers l'auteur de l'Épître aux Hébreux à Mélanchthon." He was a highly trained  $\delta\iota\delta\acute{\alpha}\sigma\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ , perhaps a Jewish Christian, who had imbibed the philosophy of Alexandrian Judaism before his conversion, a man of literary culture and deep religious feeling. He writes to what is apparently a small community or circle of Christians, possibly one of the household-churches, to which he was attached. For some reason or another he was absent from them, and, although he hopes to rejoin them before long, he feels moved to send them this letter ( $13^{23f.}$ ) to rally them. It is possible to infer from  $13^{24}$  (see note) that they belonged to Italy; in any case,  $\Pi\rho\acute{o}s\ \text{'}\text{Εβραίους}$  was written either to or from some church in Italy. Beyond the fact that the writer and his readers had been evangelized by some of the disciples of Jesus ( $2^{3, 4}$ ), we know nothing more about them. The words in  $2^{3, 4}$  do not mean that they belonged to the second generation, of course, in a chronological sense, for such words would have applied to the converts of any mission during the first thirty years or so after the crucifixion, and the only other inference to be drawn, as to the date, is from passages like  $10^{32f.}$  and  $13^7$ , viz. that the first readers of  $\Pi\rho\acute{o}s\ \text{'}\text{Εβραίους}$  were not neophytes; they had lived through some rough experiences, and indeed their friend expects from them a maturity of experience and intelligence which he is disappointed to miss ( $5^{11f.}$ ); also,

<sup>1</sup> According to Professor Souter (*Text and Canon of NT*, p. 190) the epistle is ignored by the African Canon (c. 360), Optatus of Mileue in Numidia (370-385), the Acts of the Donatist Controversy, Zeno of Verona, an African by birth, and Foebadius of Agen (*ob. post 392*), while "Ambrosiaster" (fourth century?) "uses the work as canonical, but always as an anonymous work."

their original leaders have died, probably as martyrs (cp. on 13<sup>7</sup>). For these and other reasons, a certain sense of disillusionment had begun to creep over them. *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* is a λόγος παρακλήσεως, to steady and rally people who are πειραζόμενοι, their temptation being to renounce God, or at least to hesitate and retreat, to relax the fibre of loyal faith, as if God were too difficult to follow in the new, hard situation. Once, at the outset of their Christian career, they had been exposed to mob-rioting (10<sup>32f.</sup>), when they had suffered losses of property, for the sake of the gospel, and also the loud jeers and sneers which pagans and Jews alike heaped sometimes upon the disciples. This they had borne manfully, in the first glow of their enthusiasm. Now, the more violent forms of persecution had apparently passed; what was left was the dragging experience of contempt at the hand of outsiders, the social ostracism and shame, which were threatening to take the heart out of them. Such was their rough, disconcerting environment. Unless an illegitimate amount of imagination is applied to the internal data, they cannot be identified with what is known of any community in the primitive church, so scanty is our information. Least of all is it feasible to connect them with the supposed effects of the Jewish rebellion which culminated in A.D. 70. *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* cannot be later than about A.D. 85, as the use of it in Clement of Rome's epistle proves; how much earlier it is, we cannot say, but the controversy over the Law, which marked the Pauline phase, is evidently over.

It is perhaps not yet quite superfluous to point out that the use of the present tense (e.g. in 7<sup>8</sup>, 20 8<sup>2f.</sup> 9<sup>6f.</sup> 13<sup>10</sup>) is no clue to the date, as though this implied that the Jewish temple was still standing. The writer is simply using the historic present of actions described in scripture. It is a literary method which is common in writings long after A.D. 70, e.g. in Josephus, who observes (c. *Apion*, i. 7) that any priest who violates a Mosaic regulation ἀπηγόρευται μήτε τοῖς βωμοῖς παρίστασθαι μήτε μετέχειν τῆς ἄλλης ἀγιστείας (so *Ant.* iii. 6. 7-12, xiv. 2. 2, etc.). Clement of Rome similarly writes as though the Mosaic ritual were still in existence (40-41, τῷ γὰρ ἀρχιερεὶ ἰδία λειτουργεῖν δεδομέναι εἰσὶν . . . καὶ Λευῖταις ἰδία διακονεῖν ἐπέκεινται . . . προσφέρονται θυσίαι ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ μόνῃ), and the author of the *Ep. ad Diognet.* 3 writes that οἱ δὲ γε θυσίαι αὐτῷ δι' αἵματος καὶ κνίσσης καὶ ὀλοκαντωμάτων ἐπιτελεῖν οἰόμενοι καὶ ταύταις ταῖς τιμαῖς αὐτὸν γεραίρειν, οὐδέν μοι δοκοῦσι διαφέρειν τῶν εἰς τὰ κωφὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἐνδεικνυμένων φιλοτιμιῶν. The idea that the situation of the readers was in any way connected with the crisis of A.D. 66-70 in Palestine is unfounded. *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους* has nothing to do with the Jewish temple, nor with Palestinian Christians. There is not a syllable in the writing which suggests that either the author or his readers had any connexion with or interest in the contemporary temple and ritual of Judaism; their existence mattered as little to his idealist method of argument as their abolition. When he observes (8<sup>13</sup>) that the old διαθήκη was ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ, all he means is that the old régime, superseded now by Jesus, was decaying even in Jeremiah's age.

(v.)

The object of Πρὸς Ἑβραίους may be seen from a brief analysis of its contents. The writer opens with a stately paragraph, introducing the argument that Jesus Christ as the Son of God is superior (κρείττων) to angels, in the order of revelation (1<sup>1</sup>-2<sup>18</sup>), and this, not in spite of but because of his incarnation and sufferings. He is also superior (κρείττων) even to Moses (3<sup>1-6a</sup>), as a Son is superior to a servant. Instead of pursuing the argument further, the writer then gives an impressive bible reading on the 95th psalm, to prove that the People of God have still assured to them, if they will only have faith, the divine Rest in the world to come (3<sup>6b</sup>-4<sup>13</sup>). Resuming his argument, the writer now begins to show how Jesus as God's Son is superior to the Aaronic high priest (4<sup>14</sup>-5<sup>10</sup>). This is the heart of his subject, and he stops for a moment to rouse the attention of his readers (5<sup>11</sup>-6<sup>20</sup>) before entering upon the high theme. By a series of skilful transitions he has passed on from the Person of the Son, which is uppermost in chs. 1-4, to the Priesthood of the Son, which dominates chs. 7-8. Jesus as High Priest mediates a superior (κρείττων) order of religion or διαθήκη than that under which Aaron and his successors did their work for the People of God, and access to God, which is the supreme need of men, is now secured fully and finally by the relation of Jesus to God, in virtue of his sacrifice (6<sup>20</sup>-8<sup>13</sup>). The validity of this sacrifice is then proved (9<sup>1</sup>-10<sup>18</sup>); it is absolutely efficacious, as no earlier sacrifice of victims could be, in securing forgiveness and fellowship for man. The remainder of the writing (10<sup>19</sup>-13<sup>24</sup>) is a series of impressive appeals for constancy. The first (10<sup>19-31</sup>) is a skilful blend of encouragement and warning. He then appeals to the fine record of his readers (10<sup>32f.</sup>), bidding them be worthy of their own past, and inciting them to faith in God by reciting a great roll-call of heroes and heroines belonging to God's People in the past, from Abel to the Maccabean martyrs (11<sup>1-40</sup>). He further kindles their imagination and conscience by holding up Jesus as the Supreme Leader of all the faithful (12<sup>1-3</sup>), even along the path of suffering; besides, he adds (12<sup>4-11</sup>), suffering is God's discipline for those who belong to his household. To prefer the world (12<sup>12-17</sup>) is to incur a fearful penalty; the one duty for us is to accept the position of fellowship with God, in a due spirit of awe and grateful confidence (12<sup>18-29</sup>). A brief note of some ethical duties follows (13<sup>1-7</sup>), with a sudden warning against some current tendencies to compromise their spiritual religion (13<sup>8-16</sup>). A postscript (13<sup>17-24</sup>), with some *personalia*, ends the epistle.

It is artificial to divide up a writing of this kind, which is not