

## The Early Christian Church in Egypt.

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THE Epistle 'to the Hebrews' declares itself to have been addressed to a definite community of Christians (5<sup>11f.</sup> 13<sup>23</sup>), who had received their knowledge of salvation from the hearers of Jesus (2<sup>9</sup>), who not very long after their conversion had been exposed to a persecution that involved public insult, imprisonment, and confiscation of goods (10<sup>32-34</sup>), but no loss of life (12<sup>4</sup>),<sup>1</sup> who had been Christians for a time long enough (5<sup>12</sup>, διὰ τὸν χρόνον) to involve the deaths of some of their leaders (13<sup>7</sup>), but not of a majority of their own number, and who—though apparently organized by themselves—were in close touch with other 'saints' (13<sup>24a</sup>).<sup>2</sup> This last-mentioned fact, together with the obvious homogeneity of the readers, suggests that they constituted no single city-church as a whole, but a definite group of some size<sup>3</sup> within or alongside the rest of the local church. Such a separate appeal to a *section* of a local church is without parallel in the New Testament and in early Christian literature. The only basis of division that seems a probable explanation of the fact is that between Jewish and Gentile Christians. If this division is involved here, there can be no doubt as to which of the two groups our Epistle is concerned with. It is quite true that the dangers against which the readers are warned are not trust in circumcision, or in sacrifices, or in legal or ceremonial righteousness: and this fact, together with the writer's use of the Septuagint and other features, makes it unlikely that he is addressing *Palestinian* Jewish Christians;<sup>4</sup> but it does not

weigh equally heavily against the hypothesis that the readers were Jews of the Dispersion, while the total absence of clear allusions to heathenism renders it very improbable that they were simply Gentile Christians.<sup>5</sup>

Now there is no place (outside Palestine) where Jewish and Gentile Christians are so likely to have maintained for some time their separate organizations as Alexandria. The only serious alternative is Rome. But if, as is almost certain,<sup>6</sup> the Epistle was written after 64 A.D., and if 12<sup>4</sup> refers to persecution, then Rome is impossible, for the Roman Christians *had* 'resisted unto blood' in that year.<sup>7</sup> The question could be settled finally if we could be sure of the meaning of 13<sup>24b</sup>: Ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας. The Greek here might mean either (1) 'Italian Christians away from Italy send greetings to you in Italy,' or (2) 'Italian Christians in Italy send greetings to you from Italy.' We have to balance the probability of people from a whole country sending greetings from that country against the probability of their doing so from somewhere outside it. If it is easy to imagine a set of Italian Christians assembled somewhere abroad, it is equally easy to imagine the temporary presence, say in Rome, of Christians belonging to other Italian cities, and their consequent dispatch of greetings *from* Italy. The grammatical evidence seems rather to support this latter view.<sup>8</sup>

If the more obvious lines of evidence converge on the Jewish-Christian community at Alexandria

<sup>5</sup> As Dr. Moffatt (*L.N.T.* 443-446, 448-451) and others hold: but he admits that the danger was relapse into 'speculative or theoretical Judaism' (445; cf. 449f.). The case for Jewish-Christian readers of *some* type is convincingly put by Bruce (*H.D.B.* ii. 337a) and Peake (12-16).

<sup>6</sup> From the dependence of Heb. on Paul's Epistles and on 1 Peter (Moffatt, 439f., 453; Holtzmann, *N.T.Th.* ii. 324-329: *per contra* Bruce in *H.D.B.* ii. 336), and from the mention of Timotheos to the exclusion of Paul. Cf. also 13<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The importance of 12<sup>4</sup> is strangely ignored in some recent arguments for the Roman destination. The fact that Clemens of Rome is the earliest to quote Heb. is as easily explained on the supposition that it was written *at* Rome as on the hypothesis of its having been sent *to* Rome.

<sup>8</sup> Moulton, *Prolegomena*, i. 237; Robertson, *Grammar of Gk.N.T.* 548, 578.

<sup>1</sup> Peake (*Cent. Bible*, ad loc.) doubts whether 'resisted unto blood,' etc., refers to persecution, since the author is here *blaming* his readers, and would not blame them for not having been martyred: he thinks the words mean 'resisted sin in deadly earnest,' and adds: 'That the metaphor is not elsewhere found cannot decide against the claims of exegesis.' But as the context refers also to suffering and persecution, these 'claims of exegesis' are not strong enough to outweigh the *natural* meaning of the expression, which incidentally is confirmed by the non-mention of bloodshed in 10<sup>32-34</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., however, 1 Th 5<sup>26</sup>, Ph 4<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 'A small group or circle' or 'one of the household churches' (Moffatt, *L.N.T.* 443, 447) would hardly have merited an Epistle like this all to themselves.

<sup>4</sup> Von Soden in *E.B.* 1994-7; Peake, *op. cit.* 22-24; Moffatt, *L.N.T.* 446.

as the recipients of the Epistle, and on Rome as the place of dispatch, a number of minor arguments can be mentioned by way of confirmation. The use of the Epistle by Clemens and Hermas at Rome, and by the author of 'Barnabas' at Alexandria, is readily explained. So also is the strongly Alexandrian cast of thought visible in it.<sup>1</sup> The parallel titles of the two uncanonical Gospels *κατ' Αιγυπτίου* and *καθ' Ἐβραίου* make their first appearance in Egypt, and suggest that these Gospels were used respectively by the Gentile (Egyptian) and Jewish sections of the Alexandrian Christian Church, before the four canonical Gospels were recognized as supreme. If that be so, the title of our Epistle, *πρὸς Ἐβραίους*, which is admittedly not what its author called it, might well preserve a tradition of its original destination, and indicate the Alexandrian Jewish Christians as its first readers.<sup>2</sup> The Muratorian Fragment does not mention any Epistle to the Hebrews, but refers to one 'ad Alexandrinos'; the description of it, however, as forged in Paul's name, 'ad haeresem Marcionis,' shows that, if Heb. is referred to, the author of the fragment has fallen into some confusion in regard to it (which is not in itself unlikely). The fact that the Alexandrian fathers, Clemens and Origenes, believed that Heb. was sent to Palestine, could be explained by the supposition that it had remained unknown for so long that the real circumstances of its origin and the meaning of its title had been completely forgotten, through the early passing away of the *separate* Jewish-Christian community at Alexandria.

Owing to the apparently accidental<sup>3</sup> loss of the greeting, we are without direct internal evidence as to the name of the author. We know only that it was not Paul, but one of the Pauline circle or

<sup>1</sup> Moffatt, *L.N.T.* 27 f., 427 f. (use of *Wisdom of Solomon* and Philo).

<sup>2</sup> So Harnack, *Chronologie*, i. 479 (title presupposes 'dass es irgend einmal eine Zeit in Alexandrien gegeben haben muss, in der sich Ἐβραῖοι und Αἰγύπτιοι in den ägyptischen Gemeinden gegenüber gestanden haben'), 612 f., 638 f. Cf. Stanton, *Gospels as Historical Documents*, i. 266 f.

<sup>3</sup> It is hard to believe that the author would plunge at once *in medias res* with no opening salutations, in order not to mar the effect of his stately introduction (so Peake). A partial analogy to this loss or suppression of a personal opening might be found in 2 Clem., if Harnack's theory that it was the epistle of Soter, bishop of Rome, to Corinth could be accepted.

school, not a personal disciple of Jesus (2<sup>3</sup>), but 'a highly trained Hellenistic Jewish Christian, a *διδάσκαλος* of repute, with speculative gifts and literary culture,'<sup>4</sup> an Alexandrian in theology, and one who had himself shared in the evangelization and instruction of his teachers (5<sup>11f.</sup> 10<sup>32</sup> 13<sup>10.</sup> 23). In view of all this, it is difficult to understand the reluctance of many modern authorities to accept the early and definite external evidence to the effect that the author was Barnabas.<sup>5</sup> Various objections to this tradition have been raised,<sup>6</sup> but the only one of any real weight is the difficulty of explaining how, if Barnabas was the author, the opinion could have arisen later at Alexandria (Pantainos, Clemens, and in part Origenes) that the Epistle had emanated from Paul. But assuming that Paul was not the author, this Pauline tradition tells no more heavily against the authorship of Barnabas than against that of any one else. All it proves is that virtually all record of the real author's name had disappeared by 180 A.D. The early accidental loss of the greeting, and the lapse of a century, would amply account for this disappearance. Furthermore, the attachment of Barnabas' name to another writing known at Alexandria—the 'Epistle of Barnabas'—is itself a sort of indication that he was known to have written something or other in connexion with Alexandria and Judaism. It is just conceivable, hardly more, that 'the word of exhortation' (He 13<sup>22</sup>) may have suggested the authorship of 'the son of exhortation'; but is easier to believe that the phrase is a playful allusion by Barnabas himself to his own nickname (Ac 4<sup>36</sup> 11<sup>23</sup> 13<sup>15</sup>). Nothing like so good a case can be made out for any of the other candidates that have been brought forward

<sup>4</sup> Moffatt, *L.N.T.* 442.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian takes his authorship for granted. Origenes' opinion is variably expressed, but in one passage he quotes He 13<sup>16</sup> as a word of Barnabas (Moffatt, 437).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Schmiedel (*E.Bi.* 487) refers to the author's apparent ignorance of Jewish ritual [but the errors are not certain (*op. cit.* 1998)], and even if they were, it was quite possible for a Levite like Barnabas to be wrong on a few points of detail], to his disclaimer (2<sup>3</sup>) of first-hand knowledge of Jesus [but Barnabas is not described in Acts as an eye-witness of Jesus, and may well have joined the Church three or four years after the crucifixion], and to Barnabas' leanings to Mosaism (Gal 2<sup>12</sup>) [but this was fifteen years at least before Heb. was written, and it is clear that Barnabas was guilty only of a momentary inconsistency]. As Von Soden remarks (*E.Bi.* 1993), 'the intrinsic objections to authorship by Barnabas are not important.'

—Luke, Apollos, Silas, Peter, Clemens of Rome, and least of all for that strange ‘last infirmity’ of certain noble minds, Priscilla!

What we know from Acts of the movements of Barnabas leaves ample room for the few new facts which Hebrews adds to his biography. When he quarrelled with Paul at Antioch in 49 A.D., he took his cousin Mark and went with him to Cyprus (Ac 15<sup>39</sup>). We do not hear of him again till 55 A.D., when Paul mentions him in 1 Co 9<sup>6</sup> as a bachelor-missionary—who, like himself, worked for his living. What was he doing in the interval? It seems clear that he kept away from Paul’s field—Asia Minor, Macedonia, and European Hellas. What more natural than that he should have gone to Egypt<sup>1</sup> and Cyrene? He appears in the *Clementine Homilies* (1<sup>36</sup>. 2<sup>4</sup>)—the material of which belongs to the third century—as preaching at Alexandria. Mark, his companion, figures in a list that probably goes back in the main to Julius Africanus (about 220 A.D.), as first bishop of Alexandria (from 43 to 61 A.D.). The dates are doubtless wrong, probably the episcopate also, but not necessarily the man’s name.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing certain is known, prior to this probable visit of Barnabas and Mark, of Christianity in Africa. Jews from Egypt, Libya, and Cyrene were present in the crowd round Peter at Pentecost, 29 A.D. (Ac 2<sup>9</sup>), and disputed with Stephen in their synagogue at Jerusalem in 34 A.D. (Ac 6<sup>9</sup>, reading *Λιβυστίων* for *Λιβυρτίων*). The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac 8<sup>26-40</sup>) and the first evangelization of Cyprus (Ac 11<sup>19</sup>) took place between 34 and 40 A.D. There was a Christian from Cyrene at Antioch in 47 A.D. (Ac 13<sup>1</sup>). The later mention by Mark (15<sup>21</sup>) of ‘Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus,’ may be a trace of Mark’s interest in that region. That Christianity existed at Alexandria soon after 50 A.D. can be inferred from the appearance of the learned Alexandrian Jewish Christian Apollos at Ephesus in 52 A.D., especially if we can rely on the explicit statement of Codex Bezae in Ac 18<sup>25</sup> that Apollos had been

<sup>1</sup> Under the dynasty of the Ptolemaioi, Cyprus was always closely attached to Egypt (Smith’s *Dict. Gk. and Rom. Geog.*, i. 730f.).

<sup>2</sup> The authorities are quoted in full by Swete, *Mark* xviii. f.; cf. Harnack, *Chron.* i. 123f. I see, however, that Dr. Moffatt, in *The Hibbert Journal*, Jan. 1922, p. 379, mentions ‘A. Heckel’s essay on *Die Kirche von Aegypten* (1918) with its disproof of the legend that Mark founded the Alexandrian Church.’

orally instructed in the way of the Lord ‘in his (own) country’ (ἐν τῇ πατρίδι).<sup>3</sup> Whether the fact that ‘he knew only the baptism of John’ makes it unlikely that he had been the pupil of Barnabas or Mark is difficult to say; but his activity at Corinth in ‘powerfully confuting *the Jews* (and that) publicly’ may possibly be taken as pointing back to at least one important sphere of the work of the earliest Christian missionaries at Alexandria, namely, the Jewish synagogues.

Heb. 10<sup>32ff.</sup> suggests that the readers had undergone a vexatious persecution some considerable time before the Epistle was written, but not very long after their conversion; and 13<sup>3. 13</sup> indicate that a new persecution was just commencing. If we are right in our conjectures, the former persecution would be, not that inaugurated by Nero, but some local anti-Jewish outbreak, such as occurred not infrequently at Alexandria, possibly some provincial accompaniment of, or sequel to, Claudius’ expulsion of the Jews from Rome about 50 A.D. It is, however, quite possible that the second persecution—contemporaneous with the dispatch of the Epistle—was the first burst of the ‘institutum Neronianum’ on the Christians of Alexandria. While Mark appears at Rome in 59 A.D. (Col 4<sup>10</sup>, Philem<sup>24</sup>), in Asia Minor in 64 A.D. (2 Ti 4<sup>11</sup>), and at Rome again 64–65 A.D. (1 P 5<sup>13</sup>), Barnabas—so we may infer from He 13<sup>19. 28</sup>, and from his non-appearance at Rome in connexion with either of the two imprisonments of Paul—probably confined himself to Cyrene, Egypt, and Palestine, and did not come to Rome until Paul and Peter had both suffered martyrdom (64–65 A.D.). There he would meet with Timotheos, who had come from Ephesus to Rome in response to Paul’s appeal (2 Ti 4<sup>9ff.</sup>), and had been put in prison in the course of Nero’s persecution. Happily, however, Timotheos was liberated (He 13<sup>29</sup>); and Barnabas was able to tell the Jewish Christians of Alexandria (who were now beginning to feel the pressure of the precedent set by Nero in 64 A.D.) that he would be able shortly to return to them and to bring Timotheos with him. The interval between 50 A.D. and the date of the Epistle—65–67 A.D.<sup>4</sup>—would be sufficient to explain the use of such phrases as those of 5<sup>12</sup> 6<sup>1</sup>, and for the reference to the decease of a number of revered leaders (13<sup>7</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> But the Neutral Text by itself almost implies as much.

<sup>4</sup> He 8<sup>18</sup> 10<sup>25</sup> 12<sup>26f.</sup> are probably allusions to the impending catastrophe in Palestine of 70 A.D.

That this reconstruction of the facts depends to a considerable extent on conjecture is not to be denied; but in view of the scantiness of our data, the same would have to be said of any reconstruction whatever. It may perhaps be tentatively claimed that the theory here advocated enables us

simply and easily to harmonize a larger number of such positive indications as we possess than does any other theory involving the Roman residence or non-Jewish character of the readers, or rejecting the authorship of Barnabas, or dating the Epistle considerably later than 70 A.D.

## Literature.

### ARISTOTLE.

THE Clarendon Press translation of 'The Works of Aristotle,' now the war is over, has begun again and will make steady progress to the end. It is a great undertaking. For this is not the crib to be used for a pass and then cast aside. The translation of every book is done by a scholar of tried and acknowledged ability. It is made from a revised text, which has cost time and thought to construct. It is accompanied with notes which illustrate both the text and the translation. And it is such a rendering of the original as one can read with pleasure and yet rely upon. The latest volume contains the *De Coelo* and the *De Generatione et Corruptione* (Humphrey Milford; 10s. net).

### PREACHING.

The Anglican neglect of preaching is a thing of the past. We know only one lecturer now who makes light of it. And he is old enough to be obsolete. The Rev. Paul B. Bull, M.A., Priest of the Community of the Resurrection, has published a volume of *Lectures on Preaching and Sermon Construction* (S.P.C.K.; 8s. 6d. net), one of the fullest and best books on the subject ever issued. It is especially full on the construction of the sermon—some will think too full, but Mr. Bull knows his audience and the neglect which he has to remedy. Very wise are his words on the use of illustrations. He does not add 'and abuse.' Illustrations are rarely abused; it is only a fashion to say so, and the fashion has been made by the indolent preacher who will not give himself the trouble to find them. But Mr. Bull insists upon the necessity of appositeness and accuracy. Thus on accuracy: 'Be careful, too, in every detail of an illustration. When Mr. E. Phillips Oppenheim,

in *False Evidence* (p. 128), makes the hero, describing his struggle with a poacher, say, "We rolled over and over in a fierce embrace, his teeth almost meeting in my hand which held him by the throat," the thrills of the conflict died down into worrying speculations as to the exact position of a poacher's teeth, until I was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the author had fully justified the title of his book.'

Most timely also is the chapter on style. And especially effective are the notes on mistakes to be avoided. They will be found on another page.

### THE POETRY OF DANTE.

Messrs. Allen & Unwin have issued an English translation of *The Poetry of Dante* by Benedetto Croce (10s. 6d. net). The translator is Mr Douglas Ainslie.

Croce holds that Dante's commentators, in all lands, have given attention to the politics and even to the geography of the *Divina Commedia* and have neglected its poetry. He insists upon this at great length and with much severity. His own determination is to pass by all the allegorical and historical allusions, or to touch them very lightly, and get to the poetry. The *Commedia* is a poem, the greatest in the world, as it well becomes an Italian to assert, and if we do not find it so we lose it.

For when we forget that it is first and last a poem we say, for example, that the *Inferno* is the best and the *Paradiso* the worst of it, and give as a reason that Dante had experience of the one and not of the other. In the former case he could describe what he had himself passed through on earth, of the latter he had had no taste or touch. But 'Dante knew what his critics do not know or have forgotten, that Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise,