

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

MY purpose in the following series of papers is to expound the Epistle to the Hebrews, or the larger portion of it, in relation to its leading idea, or distinctive conception of the Christian religion. The main object of this introductory paper, therefore, must be to state what that central idea is. But as this question is closely connected with another, viz. what was the religious condition of the first readers, and that again to a certain subordinate extent with a third, viz. who were the first readers, it will be expedient to approach the main question by a brief preliminary discussion of the other two.

1. Who were the first readers? The title of the writing in the most ancient MSS. is *to the Hebrews*, and even if, with some, we should question its originality and regard it as a prefix by a later hand, the destination of the writing would still be tolerably certain from its contents. It is obviously a book written for the special benefit of Christians of Jewish descent and accustomed to Jewish religious institutions. The only question that can be raised is whether the Epistle, for such from its close it appears to have been, was intended to be a circular letter for Hebrew Christians in all parts of the world, or for a particular community settled in one place. Opinion preponderates in favour of the latter alternative, and there are some things in the Epistle which seem to show that it is the correct one. In the closing chapter we find the writer asking his readers to

pray for him that he may be restored to them the sooner ;¹ and informing them that brother Timothy is set at liberty, and that he hopes soon to visit them along with him.² In the last sentence but one he sends salutations to them from certain brethren who were natives of Italy. "Those of (or from) Italy salute you."³ These requests, notices, and salutations, imply an acquaintance with the writer, with Timothy, and with Italian Christians, such as could hardly be possessed by all Jewish Christians.

But if the Hebrews to whom the Epistle is addressed were a special community, where did they reside? In Palestine, and more particularly in Jerusalem, according to ancient patristic opinion, and the fact is of itself a presumption in favour of the hypothesis. The opinion of the ancients, if not based on a certain historical tradition, may at least be regarded as a good guess. But the main argument in favour of Jerusalem is one of which the full force cannot be felt till the second question I propose to consider has been answered. Meanwhile it can be briefly stated. The Epistle in its whole contents implies a very grave situation. Those to whom it is addressed are in danger of apostasy, not merely from outward tribulation, but even more from a reactionary state of mind. The evidence of reaction is the pains taken to meet it by an exhibition of the nature and excellence of the Christian religion in comparison with the Levitical. Now this state of mind was more likely to be found in Palestine, and in Jerusalem above all, than anywhere else ; especially if, as may be inferred from some things in the Epistle, the temple was still standing and the temple worship was still going on when it was written. Jerusalem was the home of Jewish conservatism, and all the influences there tended to develop and strengthen even in Christian circles a reactionary spirit. It is this consideration which tells in favour of the Jeru-

¹ xiii. 18, 19.

² xiii. 23.

³ xiii. 24

salem hypothesis as against its Alexandrian rival. In the neighbourhood of Alexandria, at Leontopolis, there was a temple where Jews resident in Egypt might worship, which outlasted the temple at Jerusalem by one or two years. In so far, therefore, as anything in the Epistle implies the present practice of temple worship, that part of the problem might be met as well by Alexandria as by Jerusalem. But the religious atmosphere of Alexandria was less conservative than that of Jerusalem. There one might expect to find in the Christian community a type of thought more in sympathy with that of the writer of our Epistle. For such readers such a writing was not needed. To outward trial they might be exposed, but in absence of the more serious inward trial there was no occasion for so elaborate an apology for the Christian faith.

Objections to the Jerusalem hypothesis have been stated, which to not a few modern scholars have appeared insuperable. Perhaps the most formidable is the language in which the Epistle is written. If it was addressed to the Church in the Holy City, why was it not written in Aramaic, the language with which they were most familiar? In ancient times this difficulty was met by the suggestion that the Epistle was originally written in the Hebrew tongue, and then translated into Greek. This opinion, as held by Clement of Alexandria and others, was merely a device to get over the stylistic objections to Pauline authorship and the linguistic objections to Palestinian readers. If the Epistle was written originally in Hebrew it might be Paul's though the Greek is not his, and it might be meant for Jews in Jerusalem as its first readers, though they understood Greek with difficulty or not at all. The hypothesis has nothing besides to recommend it; for no one reading the Epistle and noting the fluent style of the Greek, and the original cast both of thought and expression, will readily acquiesce in the view that what we have here is a translation

out of another tongue, so entirely different in structure, of the thoughts of another mind. The simplest solution of the difficulty in question is, that the writer of the Epistle used the language which he had at command. A Hellenist, he wrote in Greek, hoping to be understood by his readers sufficiently well, if not perfectly.

The other objections are less weighty. One is an inference based on chapter ii. 3, that the writer thinks of his readers as residing in a land in which Christ Himself had not personally taught. But we are not shut up to this interpretation. The statement in the text cited does not necessarily mean more than this, that the writer and his readers belonged to a generation which had not enjoyed the benefit of Christ's personal ministry, but had been indebted for instruction in Christianity to His disciples. Another objection is also based on a misunderstanding of a statement in the Epistle, that contained in chapter xii. 4: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin." This is taken to mean, "your Church has not yet had any martyrs," it being assumed that the writer views the Church as a moral person, and speaks of its whole past history. It is more in accordance with the practical purpose of the statement to assume that the writer is thinking only of those who shall actually read his Epistle, and means to say, Ye have not yet had to suffer persecution in the extreme form, why lose heart?

The objection based on the allusion, at the close of the Epistle, to Timothy, is an argument *ex ignorantia*. We do not know what relations may have subsisted between Timothy and the Palestine Churches, and therefore are not entitled, on the ground of the implied relation, to deny a Palestinian destination.

Notwithstanding all that has been urged against it, then, I hold to the view entertained by the ancients, and powerfully advocated in the masterly work of Bleek, that the

Hebrews to whom the Epistle was first addressed were resident in Palestine, or more definitely in Jerusalem. All that has been said against it admits of reply, and all that has been said in favour of other places, such as Rome, simply shows that they satisfy more or less the conditions of the problem, and are not improbable suggestions. None of them satisfy so well as Jerusalem the main condition, viz. the moral and spiritual situation required by the contents of the Epistle. That situation we have now more particularly to consider.

2. The position of those to whom our Epistle was written was one full of peril both from outward and from inward causes. They were in danger of apostatising from the faith because of persecution endured on account of it, and also because of doubts concerning its truth. The former part of this description of their state rests on express statements in the Epistle. That they had in time past been a persecuted people is manifest from chapter x. 32: "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." That they were subject to tribulation on account of their faith still is plain from the fact that they are exhorted to remember their former experiences and their heroic bearing under them as an aid to patience now. The fact is also apparent from the eloquent recital of pious deeds done by the fathers in ancient days, in the eleventh chapter. The noble army of martyrs is made to march past as in a military review, to inspire the living sufferers with martial fortitude. Then, when the main body of the army has marched past, the attention of the spectators is directed to the Great Captain, for the same end. Tried Christians are bid look at Jesus, that His example may keep them from growing weary and faint in their minds.

The inner spiritual condition of the Hebrews is not so plainly and explicitly described, but ominous hints occur here

and there in the Epistle from which it can, with tolerable certainty, be inferred. They are in danger of slipping away from the Christian faith, as a boat is carried past the landing place by the strong current of a stream (chap. ii. 1). They have become dull in hearing, and in all their spiritual senses; they are in their dotage or second childhood and need again to be fed with milk, *i.e.* to be taught anew the rudiments of the Christian faith, instead of with the strong meat which befits spiritual manhood (chap. v. 11-14). Their state is such as to suggest to a faithful instructor, anxious for their welfare, thoughts of a final apostasy and malignant renunciation of Christ, and to call up before his mind the unwelcome picture of a land well tilled and rained upon, yet bringing forth only thorns and briars, and so nigh unto cursing (chap. vi. 6-8). Evidently those of whom such things can be said are men who have never had insight into the genius and glory of the Christian religion, who as time went on have fallen more and more out of sympathy with the faith they profess, and who are now held on to it chiefly by the tie of custom which under the stress of outward trial may be snapped at any moment; insomuch that their enlightened friend who writes to them feels it necessary to make a desperate effort to rescue them from the impending danger, by trying to show to them what is so clear to his own mind—the incomparable excellence and grandeur of the Christian religion.

That effort, in which the writer, stimulated by a supreme occasion, puts forth all his great intellectual and moral strength, is the best evidence that the foregoing account of the spiritual state of the Hebrew Church is not exaggerated. Such an effort was not made without urgent cause. The writers of the New Testament were not literary busybodies: they wrote under constraint of imperious needs. When Paul writes epistles to prove that salvation is through faith alone, it is because there is a powerful party at work

who are endeavouring to subvert the Gospel of grace by reintroducing a religion of legalism. In like manner when some unknown doctor in the Church sets himself to commend Christianity as the perfect religion, it is because he finds many fellow Christians clinging to Levitical shadows, unable to see that when the perfect has come the rudely imperfect should be allowed to pass away. No greater mistake could be committed than to assume that the readers of this Epistle were in the main in sympathy with the doctrinal views of the writer, and that the chief occasion for its being written was the need for consolation and strengthening under outward trial.¹ Such an assumption involves a virtual reflection on the judgment of the writer in expatiating at unnecessary length on accepted truths, and it must exercise a prejudicial influence on the exposition of the weightier, that is the doctrinal, part of the Epistle, taking the soul out of it for the expositor, and making the most striking thoughts appear in his eyes mere theological commonplaces. Thus the remarkable combination of the idea of *a forerunner* with that of a High Priest in chapter vi. 20, will probably provoke no remark, but be quietly passed by as if it were as familiar to the first readers as it has become to us; whereas it must have appeared quite startling in their eyes, and not unnaturally, as that one word *πρόδρομος* expresses the whole essential difference between the Christian and the Levitical

¹ So Professor A. B. Davidson, in his scholarly commentary on this Epistle in *Handbooks for Bible Classes*. "The writer," he says, "evidently feels that, on the whole, he has his readers on his side" (p. 14). The description given of the inner condition of the Church is very faint and colourless, the only specific features mentioned being coldness, and an imperfect comprehension of the atonement. Any tendency to apostasy from the faith is conceived of as confined to a few individuals (p. 12). That the truths taught in this Epistle are theological commonplaces is expressly stated. "The Epistle is written from the secondary position of theological reflection upon the facts. The fact that the Son is a High Priest is a commonplace to his readers" (p. 106). The consequence of this view is that this work, while learned and accurate and helpful in details, is disappointing as a whole, and does not seem to lead up to any result.

religion—between the religion that brings men nigh to God, and the religion that kept or left men standing afar off.

Observing the points which are emphasized in the Epistle, we gather that three things connected with Christianity were stumbling-blocks to the Hebrew Christians :—

(1) The superseding of an ancient, divinely appointed religion by what appeared to be a novelty and an innovation. The Levitical worship was of venerable antiquity, and not of man's devising but of God's ordering; and how a system which had lasted so long and had derived its origin from heaven could ever pass away, and how it could be legitimately replaced by a religion which was of yesterday, were matters which ill-instructed Hebrew believers were at a loss to comprehend. Nor can we wonder greatly at this, when we consider with what desperate tenacity many at all times cling to old religious customs which can make no pretensions to Divine origin, but are merely human inventions.

(2) The Hebrew Christians found another stumbling-block in the humiliation and sufferings of Jesus regarded as the Christ. They were unable to reconcile the indignity of Christ's earthly experience with the dignity of His Person as the Son of God and promised Messiah. They did not see the glory of the Cross. They were unable to understand and appreciate the honour which was conferred upon Jesus in His being appointed to taste death as the Saviour and Sanctifier of sinners. They were unable to comprehend how it was consistent with the character of the First Cause and Last End of all things either to permit or to command His Son to pass through a curriculum of suffering and temptation as a qualification for office as the Captain of Salvation. In this respect they were like the apostles in the days of their discipleship, who, having confessed their faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, were utterly confounded when they heard their Master

immediately after go on to tell "how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things," and even be put to death. The pains taken and the ingenuity displayed by the writer in endeavouring to make it clear that suffering, or death, was for one reason or another a necessary experience of one occupying Christ's position, shows how much his readers stood in need of enlightenment on the subject.

(3) The third stumbling-block in Christianity to the mind of the Hebrews was the absence therefrom of a priesthood, and a sacrificial ritual. For that Christ was at once a Priest and a Sacrifice, they do not seem to have been able to comprehend, or even to imagine. Their ideas of priesthood and sacrifices were legal and technical. A priest was a man belonging to the tribe of Levi and to the family of Aaron, physically faultless, whose business it was to offer in behalf of the people the blood of bulls and goats as a sacrifice for sin. Of course Jesus could lay no claims to a priesthood of that sort. He was not of the tribe of Levi, or the house of Aaron, and He had nothing to offer—nothing, that is, which the legal mind could regard as a victim. And of any other priesthood than the legal, men accustomed to Levitical rites doubtless found it difficult to form any conception. A priest without priestly robes, and visible materials of sacrifice such as oxen, sheep, and goats, was to them a shadowy, unreal being. The author of the Epistle was well aware that such was the feeling of his readers; his whole manner of treating the subject betrays consciousness of the fact. Thus when he introduces a reference to the royal priesthood of Melchisedec to show them that a priesthood other than legal was recognised in Scripture and to help them to rise up to the thought of the spiritual, eternal, priesthood of Christ, he cannot refrain from giving expression to a feeling of irritation, as if conscious beforehand that he will not succeed in carrying their intelligence and sympathy along

with him. He feels it to be a hard, thankless task to set forth such lofty truths to dull, custom-ridden, mechanical minds.

Such being the situation of the parties addressed, it is easy to see what must be the character of a writing designed and fitted to conduct afflicted and doubting Christians through the perils of a transition time. It must be a composition combining argument and exhortation, now expounding or proving a great spiritual truth, now turning aside to utter a warning, or bringing to bear on heavy-hearted men practical considerations of a cheering, inspiring, comforting kind. Such accordingly is this Epistle. It is not a mere dry theological treatise, though it certainly begins in an abstract theological manner without preface or salutation. It is what it is called in the superscription in our English Testament, an epistle or letter, wherein the writer never loses sight of his readers and their perilous condition, but contrives to mingle argument and exhortation—the theoretical and the practical, so as to be at every point in contact with their hearts as well as their intellects. He does not give his theology first and thereafter its application; theology and counsel are interwoven throughout the web of the writing, so as to give to the whole the character of a “word of exhortation.”

3. The theoretical section of the Epistle, however, may be looked at apart, and the question asked, What does it teach? What conception of the Christian religion does it embody? That is the question to which we have now, at last, to turn our attention.

This section may be viewed either in relation to the occasion of its being written, or abstractly and *per se*. Viewed in this latter way it shows us the author's own mode of conceiving Christianity; viewed in the former it shows us the method which he pursued to bring others to his way of thinking. In the one aspect it is a dogmatic

treatise, in the other it is an apologetic treatise. The question we propose to consider thus resolves itself into two: What is the author's own idea of Christianity? and, What is his method of insinuating it into minds prepossessed with beliefs more or less incompatible therewith?

The author's own idea. He regards Christianity as the perfect, and therefore the final, religion. It is perfect because it accomplishes the end of religion, and because it does this it can never be superseded. Nothing better can take its place. But what is the end of religion? To bring men nigh to God, to establish between man and God a fellowship as complete and intimate as if sin had never existed. This accordingly is what the writer of our Epistle emphasizes. Christianity for him is the religion of free, unrestricted access to God; the religion of a new, everlasting covenant under which sin is completely extinguished and can act no longer as a separating influence. This thought runs like a refrain through the Epistle. It appears first distinctly in the place where Christ the High Priest of the New Testament is called a *forerunner* (vi. 20). Where the High Priest of the new era can go, we may follow, in contrast to the state of things under the old covenant, according to which the High Priest of Israel could alone go into the Most Holy Place. The thought recurs at vii. 19, where the Christian religion is in effect characterized as the religion of the better hope, because the religion through which we draw nigh to God. The same great idea lurks in the puzzle concerning the altar of incense whose position in the tabernacle it is impossible to define (ix. 4). It belonged to the place within the veil in spirit and function, but it had to be without for daily use, in connexion with the service carried on in the first compartment. The source of this anomaly was the veil, whose very existence was the emblem of a rude, imperfect religion, under which men could not get nigh to God.

Finally, how prominent a place the idea held in the writer's mind, appears from the fact that when he has finished his theoretic statement he commences his last exhortation to his readers in these terms: "Having therefore, brethren, liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith*" (x. 19-22).

This positive idea of the Christian religion contains an implicit contrast between it and the Levitical religion. The writer thinks of the latter as a religion which failed to accomplish the end of religion, and kept men or left them far off from God. Many things about it were to his view significant of this radical and fatal defect, but chiefly the veil dividing the tabernacle into two compartments,—an outer chamber accessible to the priests for the performance of their daily service, and an inner chamber accessible only to the high priest, and even to him only once a year and after the most careful precautions. That veil prohibitory and minatory was the emblem of a religion which taught a negative idea of Divine holiness, presenting God as saying: Stand off, I am unapproachably holy; and left the conscience of the worshipper unpurged, so that he was afraid to come near. As such the veil was a prophecy of transiency in reference to the system with which it was connected. For no religion may or can endure which fails in the great end for which religion exists. Accordingly in the Epistle the temporary character of the Levitical religion is proclaimed with emphasis and iteration. On the other hand, permanency is predicated of the Christian religion with if possible greater emphasis and iteration. The burden of the Epistle is: The Levitical religion for a time, Christianity for aye. Of everything connected with

Christianity eternity is predicated. The salvation it provides is *eternal*, its priesthood is *for ever*, the great High Priest possesses the power of an *endless life*, and by the offering of Himself through the *eternal* Spirit obtained *eternal* redemption for us. Those who believe in Him have the promise of an *eternal* inheritance. The new covenant is *everlasting*.

The contrast between the Levitical religion and Christianity in the essential vital point—the establishment of real unrestricted fellowship between man and God—naturally suggests the method of contrast generally as a good one for the apologetic purpose in hand. The central defect may be presumed to imply defect at all points, and on inquiry the fact will probably turn out to be so. Accordingly the writer adopts this method, and institutes a series of comparisons so managed as, while duly and even generously recognising whatever was good in the old system, to mark it indelibly with a stamp of inferiority. The first point of comparison that would naturally occur to the mind would be that of the priesthood. The Levitical religion had its high priest, with his gorgeous robes a very imposing figure. How about Christianity; can its superiority be demonstrated here? If not the case breaks down, for the whole value of a religion lies in its provisions for dealing with the problem of sin. The question of questions is, Can it perfect the worshipper as to conscience? Only where there is a perfect priest can there be a perfect religion. The writer will need all his skill to establish his case here. Not that there is any room for doubt to men possessing spiritual insight, but because he is writing to men who lack that gift, and to whom it is difficult to make it clear that Christ was a Priest at all, not to speak of His being the perfect Priest, the very ideal of Priesthood realized.

A contrast between Christ and Moses might readily

suggest itself. To institute this contrast might indeed seem to be raising questions not vital to the argument. But there was room for relevant comparison here also. For Moses was the leader of Israel during the memorable epoch of her redemption out of Egypt, and Jesus was the Captain of a still greater salvation. The general resemblance in the point of leadership might make plain some things incidental to the career of a captain. And if it could be shown that Jesus was greater than Moses it would prevent the prestige of the lesser leader from shutting the mind to the claims of the greater.

Another contrast still was possible,—one that would not readily occur to us, but which lay ready to the hand of one writing to Hebrews familiar with the current views of Jewish theology. In that theology angels figured prominently, and in particular they were believed to have been God's agents in the revelation of the law to Moses and Israel. This view gave to that revelation a very august and imposing character, through which the Christian revelation might suffer eclipse. A comparison between Christ and angels was therefore forced on a writer who desired to deal exhaustively with the sources of anti-Christian prejudices. He must show that Christ was higher in dignity than angels, that the word spoken through Him might receive due attention.

These contrasts are all instituted in the Epistle, but in the reverse order. The most remote from the centre, and as we are apt to think the least important, comes first; and the most vital, last. First the agents of revelation under the two Testaments are compared; then their respective Captains of salvation, and then finally their High Priests. It is shown first, that Christ is greater than angels as One who speaks to men in God's name; second, that He is greater than Moses as the leader of a redeemed host; third, that He is greater than Aaron as one who transacts

for men in God's presence. The argument will unfold itself gradually and need not here be outlined.

The opening sentences of the Epistle may be said to contain yet another comparison—between Christ and the *Prophets*, the human agents of the earlier revelation. This comparison is less developed and less emphasized, partly because the prophets were in the same line with Jesus, precursors rather than rivals, preaching the gospel of a Messiah and a Divine kingdom before the epoch of fulfilment, pointing on to that epoch and making no pretence to finality; partly because they were men, not angels, less likely to become the objects of an overweening idolatrous esteem. But there is a latent contrast here also, as we shall see. The revelation of the Son was the natural and needed complement of prophetic revelation.

Taken as a whole, the Epistle, in its apologetic aspect, is a masterpiece, meeting effectually a most urgent need of the early apostolic age, and in its general principles, if not in all its arguments, of perennial value to the Christian Church. At transition times, when an old world is passing away and a new world is taking its place, it is ever the fewest who enter with full intelligence and sympathy into the spirit of the new time. The majority, from timidity, reverence, or lower motives, go along with the new movement only with half their heart, and have an all but invincible hankering after old custom, and a strong reluctance to break with the past. Christ signalled and also kindly apologized for this conservative tendency when He said, "No man having drunk old wine desireth new, for he saith, the old is good." For such half-hearted ones, rife in a transition time, a prophet is needed to interpret the new, and a literature of an apologetic character, vindicating the rights of the new while knowing how to recognise the worth of the past. Such a prophet was the writer of this Epistle, and such a literature is preserved for us therein.

It is the only piece of writing in the New Testament of a formally and systematically apologetic nature. Elsewhere are to be found ideas helpful to Christians passing through a transition time, notably in the Pauline Epistles. But the stray apologetic ideas occurring in these Epistles, though valuable, were not sufficient. A more detailed and elaborate theology of mediation was wanted to accomplish the work of making Jewish believers Christians who did not look back. Paul did not go sufficiently into particulars; he spoke of the law too much as a whole; a proceeding quite natural in one who had passed through his experience. He had tried to make the law everything, and having failed, he swung to the opposite extreme and pronounced it nothing. That salvation could not come through legalism needed no proof for him, it was axiomatically clear. It was enough to say oracularly, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

That might be enough for Paul, but it was not enough for ordinary men who lacked his intense experience, clear insight, and the thoroughness which can follow to their last consequences accepted principles. A more detailed, shall I say more patient, less impassioned apologetic was wanted to carry the mass of Jewish believers safely through the perils of a transitional period. It was not enough to say: Christ is come, therefore the legal economy must take end; it was needful to point out carefully what men had got in Christ—not merely a Saviour in a general way, but the reality of all Old Testament symbols, the substance of which legal rites were shadows; to demonstrate, in short, that not grace alone but *truth* had come by Christ, truth in the sense of spiritual reality. Paul insisted mainly on the *grace* that came by Christ. It was reserved for the author of our Epistle to insist on the *truth*. Paul had not indeed altogether overlooked this aspect. His Epistles contain hints of the doctrine that the Levitical rites were

shadows of good things to come, as in the significant passage, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." But the hints remain undeveloped. Of what splendid developments they were capable, appears in our Epistle, where the Melchisedec Priesthood of Christ is unfolded with such subtlety of argument and elevation of thought as awaken the admiration of all.

If the view prevalent in the Eastern section of the early Church, that Paul was the author of our Epistle, were true, then we should have to say that in it he performed a service which he had not had leisure or occasion to render in any other epistle. But the Pauline authorship seems destitute of all probability. *A priori* it is unlikely that the man who wrote the recognised Pauline Epistles should be the man to achieve the task prescribed to the writer of this Epistle to the Hebrews. It is seldom given to one man to do for his age all that it needs. Paul surely did enough without claiming for him everything. Moreover the style, the temperament, and the cast of thought characteristic of this Epistle are markedly different from those traceable in the letters to the Galatian, Corinthian and Roman Churches. The difference in style has been often commented on, but the contrast in the other respects is even more arresting. The contrast has its source in diversity of mental constitution and of religious experience. Paul was of an impetuous, passionate, vehement nature; hence his thought rushes on like a mountain torrent leaping over the rocks. The writer of our Epistle is obviously a man of calm, contemplative, patient spirit, and hence the movement of his mind is like that of a stately river flowing through a plain. Their respective ways of looking at the law speaks to an entirely different religious history. The law had been to Paul a source of the knowledge of sin, an irritant to sin, and a murderer of hope; therefore he ascribed to it the same functions in the moral education

of mankind. The writer of our Epistle, on the other hand, appears to have gained his insight into the transient character of the Levitical religion and the glory of Christianity, not through a fruitless attempt at keeping the law with Pharisaic scrupulosity, but through a mental discipline enabling him to distinguish between symbol and spiritual reality, shadow and substance. In other words, while Paul was a moralist, he was a religious philosopher; while for Paul the organ of spiritual knowledge was the conscience, for him it was devout reason.

One reason which induced the ancients to regard Paul as the writer, and which is still not without its influence on opinion, was the wish to have for so important an Epistle a worthy, and in view of the question of canonicity, an apostolic author. And it is certainly very remarkable that the authorship of so valuable a writing should be unknown. And yet on the other hand it seems fitting that the author of an Epistle which begins by virtually proclaiming God as the only speaker in Scripture, and Jesus Christ as the one speaker in the New Testament, should himself retire out of sight into the background. Was it not meet that he who tells us at the outset that God's last great word to men was spoken by His Son, should disappear like a star in the presence of the great luminary of day? Was it not seemly that he who wrote this book in praise of Christ the Great High Priest, should be but a voice saying to all after-time, "This is God's beloved Son, hear ye Him," and that when the voice was spoken he should disappear with Moses, Aaron, and all the worthies of the old covenant, and allow Christ Himself to speak without any medium between Him and us? "When the voice was past, Jesus was found alone." So it was on the hill of transfiguration, so let it be with the Epistle to the Hebrews. Let us be content to remain in ignorance of its author, and seek the knowledge of his mind.

The canonicity of the Epistle is entirely independent of the question of authorship. It depends on canonical *function*. That the Epistle performs an important function in the organism of New Testament literature is self-evident, if the views presented in the foregoing pages as to its character and aim be correct.

A. B. BRUCE.

JEWISH CONTROVERSY AND THE "PUGIO
FIDEI."

(Conclusion.)

WE now come to the accusation against the *Pugio*, which Dr. Schiller-Szinessy divides methodically into three classes.

I. *Six proofs of forgeries pure and simple.*

1. The Midrash of R. Moses quoted in the *Pugio* (p. 354) is here composed of two different Midrashic pieces. In the first, as Dr. Schiller-Szinessy rightly points out, there is an even better reading in the *Pugio* than in our editions. The editions have Jeremiah xxx. 21, whilst the *Pugio* gives 22 as well; hence it is pronounced a forgery. Why so? Do we not find that scribes abridge quotations and others write them in full? The following passage in the *Pugio*, is fathered, according to Dr. Schiller-Szinessy, on R. Huna, who said it in the name of R. Iddi; but if it is so, Herr Epstein rightly observes that the author of the *Pugio* must have been an eminent Talmudic scholar, as he knew of these two names, which are seldom found together. Indeed, Dr. Schiller-Szinessy has misunderstood altogether the words of R. Huna; for the latter does not apply *geber* (Jer. xxxi. 22) to the Messiah, but *hadashim* as in the following passage of Psalm ii. 7: *This day I have begotten thee*, found in the Midrash Tillim. There the creation of the Messiah is called