THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS
THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS
AN HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RECONSIDERATION
THE BAIRD LECTURE, 1949

BY
WILLIAM MANSON
B.A. (Oxon), D.D. (Knox College, Toronto), D.D. (Glasgow)
Professor of Biblical Criticism in the University of Edinburgh

HODDER AND STOUGHTON LTD.
WARWICK SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.4
PREFACE

The present volume incorporates a series of lectures undertaken at the invitation of the Baird Lectureship Trustees, and delivered in the Martin Hall, New College, Edinburgh, in February 1950. I desire cordially to thank the Trustees for the honour conferred on me by the invitation and for their consent to my request under stress of other duties to defer the delivery of the lectures from the autumn of 1949 to the following spring. I wish also to acknowledge the kindness of the Principal and Senate of New College in making the Martin Hall available at the time.

The reasons which have led me to undertake a reconsideration of the purpose of the Epistle are stated in some detail in the opening chapter of the book. As a New Testament teacher I have for long been dissatisfied with the direction which critical thought, principally associated for us in this country and the English-speaking world with the names of two distinguished scholars, Professor James Moffatt and Professor E. F. Scott, has taken with regard to Hebrews during the last half-century. Whereas the older criticism understood the Epistle to reflect a phase or crisis in the evolution of Jewish Christianity in the apostolic period, the modern theory has unhitched the Epistle from these moorings and floated it out into the mid-stream of the general life of the first-century Church, so taking it out of a supposed backwater to give it a place in the main current of Christian history. On this
interpretation the religious situation of the community addressed in Hebrews had nothing specifically to do with any attraction exercised by Judaism but was determined by some form of secular drift to irreligion or to paganism.

I cannot conceal the conviction that this right-about-face in critical opinion has involved a turning of the back on some of the most salient features of the Epistle, and has therefore brought about a clouding of the issues. The new theory starts not from the central substance of Hebrews but, as it seems to me, from peripheral features and from a number of *a priori* and not sufficiently examined assumptions regarding both Judaism and Christianity in the apostolic age. I cannot therefore think that it makes real contact with history. Indeed neither the older nor the more recent approach to the problem of Hebrews has sufficiently integrated the Epistle into the historical development of the world-mission of Christianity or brought the situation behind the letter into clear and adequate focus.

In this opinion I have become confirmed by considerations based on a fresh study of the Stephen-records in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. I am convinced that a straight line runs from the teaching and apologia of the proto-martyr to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and I believe it is to be regarded as a central line in the development of the Christian world-mission. In the present book, therefore, I have sought an approach to Hebrews which will (1) integrate the Epistle afresh into the history of the world-mission from its inception in Stephen, (2) re-evaluate the potentialities of the religious situation in such a centre of world-mission Christianity as Rome, (3) trace the connection between the doctrine of Hebrews and the
theology of the world-mission as a whole, and (4) from
careful study of the argument of the Epistle, establish
conclusions as to the situation and character of the
community addressed and so recover for the Epistle
its organic position in relation to first-century evangelism
and life.

It is not necessary here to set out in detail the posi-
tions to which I have been led. They are indicated in
outline in the closing section of Chapter I, in the sum-
maries which conclude Chapters III and V, and in
Chapter VI. The historical ground of the approach
is set out in Chapter II, which deals with Stephen and
his eschatology; here is indeed the pivot on which my
whole argument turns. I have come to see that dis-
tinctions of a very important order have to be made
within the field of the Early Christian eschatology, and
that the stand taken by Stephen has been determinative
of Christian theology to its furthest bounds. I have
not, however, in the exposition of the relevant material
of Hebrews which is undertaken in Chapters III-V
attempted anything like a full commentary on the
Epistle, but have confined myself to the points which
bear on the above critical issues. There is, therefore,
no wealth of side-reference to learned works on the
more general aspects of the teaching. For myself the
results of the particular inquiry on which I have con-
centrated attention have been to broaden the outlook
both on the history—Hebrews is no mere academic
treatise—and on the theology of the world-mission of
Christianity in the New Testament age. If my con-
struction of the facts is disallowed, I shall look to see
it refuted; if it is defective, I trust it will be improved;
if it should be thought right, I hope that even within
its limits it may help at certain important points to put
Christian doctrine more squarely on the foundation of Christian history, and to show it, as I say at the end of the book, rising phoenix-like from the embers not only of Jewish legalism but of the Jewish means of grace.

W. MANSON.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,
1st September 1950.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

The rendering of the Epistle is from the author's own translation, and the same holds of passages cited from the Septuagint and other ancient texts, including verse renderings from Greek poets.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preface</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**CHAPTER I**  
**THE PROBLEM OF THE EPISTLE AND MODERN CRITICAL THOUGHT**  
**Literary, Historical, and Theological Aspects of the Problem**  
**Purpose of the Present Work**  
**Traditional and Older Approaches to the Subject**  
**The Modern Volte-Face in Criticism**  
**Criticism of the Modern Theory**  
**Provisional Statement of Positions advanced in the Present Work**  

**CHAPTER II**  
**STEPHEN AND THE WORLD-MISSION OF CHRISTIANITY**  
**Stephen**  
**The Eschatology of Stephen**  
**The Apologia of Stephen and the Epistle to the Hebrews**  
**The Rise of the Christian World-Mission**  
**Divisive Issues created by the World-Mission**
## CHAPTER III

**The Admonitory Sections of the Epistle.** - The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eschatological Life</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Word of Jesus and the Word of the Angels</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Heavenly Calling of Christians and the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschatological Now</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various Warnings relating to the Crisis</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing from First-Principles to the Full Knowledge of the Christian Mystery</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Consecrated Way</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Reminiscence and an Assurance. - The Advent of Christ</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature and Function of Faith</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cloud of Witnesses</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Exhortations</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions from Chapter III</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER IV

**The Theological Argument of the Epistle.** -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. The Person and Office of the Redeemer</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Finality of the Christian Revelation</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Significance of Christ. - The Wisdom Christology</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Incarnation in Relation to Man, Suffering, and Sin</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Hero and Priest</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

| Priest by Predestination and Incarnate Qualification | 106 |
| Priest after the Order of Melchizedek.—Priest of the Resurrection | 111 |
| Psalm CX | 117 |

CHAPTER V

THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT OF THE EPISTLE.—

II. THE OBLATION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST | 122

Priest in the Heavenly Sanctuary | 122
The New Covenant | 127
The Old and the New Sanctuaries and their Atonement-Provisions | 130
Priest through the Eternal Spirit | 133
Mediator of the New Covenant | 138
The Offering of the Body of Christ | 143
The New Christian Approach to God | 147
The Christian Altar | 149
Note on the Holy Communion in the Church | 155
Conclusions from Chapters IV and V | 156

CHAPTER VI

THE PLACE OF THE EPISTLE IN EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT | 159

The Minority Group in the Church at Rome | 159
Resistance unto Blood.—The Question of the Date of Hebrews | 162
The Writer of the Epistle | 167
| Character of the Church at Rome.—St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans | 172 |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Old Testament | 184 |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Evangelical Tradition | 187 |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews and St. Paul | 192 |
| Epilogue | 197 |
| INDEX | 199 |
Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at anytime we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? For unto the angels hath he not put in subje

Epistle to the Hebrews

1 Hebrews 1. 1. 2.  

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any A considerable variety of opinions on this subject has been advanced from the earliest times. From around AD 400 to 1600, the author was traditionally considered to be Paul. However, the epistle makes no internal claim of authorship, which is inconsistent with the rest of Paul's epistles. Also, while many of the letter's ideas are Pauline, the writing style is substantially different than that of Paul's epistles, nor does the epistle contain a discourse on Apostolic authority. The author of the