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After Fifty Years.

II. The Text of the Greek New Testament.

By Sir F. G. Kenyon, London.

Fifty years ago the state of knowledge and opinion with regard to the text of the New Testament was as it had been left by the Revised Version of 1881, and the edition of the Greek text by Westcott and Hort in the same year. Both were the result of the long accumulation of evidence which began with the arrival of the Codex Alexandrinus in England in 1627 (sixteen years after the publication of the Authorized Version), and culminated in Tischendorf's discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus in 1859, and his publication in 1867 of the first satisfactory edition of the Codex Vaticanus. By that time it had become evident to scholars that the Greek text printed by Stephanus in 1550, from which the Authorized Version had been translated, could no longer be accepted as satisfactory. It rested for the most part on a handful of late manuscripts which embodied the text that, after centuries of corruption and correction at the hands of scribes and editors, had become standardized in the Eastern Church. In the case of no work of classical literature would scholars be satisfied with manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries if manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries were available; and that was the position in which Biblical scholars found themselves in the second half of the nineteenth century.

It was in these conditions that Westcott and Hort addressed themselves to the preparation of a new edition of the Greek New Testament. Utilizing the materials accumulated by many scholars and arranged by Tregelles and Tischendorf, they classified them on lines laid down by Bengel and Griesbach into three main groups: (1) the type of text found in the great mass of later authorities, which they called *Syrian*, because it first makes its appearance in the Syrian Fathers of the end of the fourth century, but for which the better name is *Byzantine*, as denoting that it became the standard text of the Byzantine Church; (2) the type found in the Vatican and Sinaitic Codices and the small group of authorities that support them, which they called *Neutral*, because they thought it had come down without material contamination or editorial rehandling; and (3) the type found especially in Græco-Latin manuscripts such as Codex Bezæ and in the Old Latin version, with support from the Old Syriac version and several of the early Fathers, which they called *Western*, because of its predominantly Latin attestation. As between these three, they ruled out the first as being a late and secondary type of text; and as between the remaining two, both of which were found in early witnesses, they rejected the Western as showing all the signs of editorial mishandling and an unjustifiably free treatment of the text, and pinned their faith on the Neutral type, and particularly and predominantly on the Codex Vaticanus.

Westcott and Hort were members of the Revision Committee, and carried much weight by reason of their scholarship and intimate acquaintance with the subject; and though not all the Revisers would go all the way with them, it was under their predominant influence that the Revised Version was produced. And when the dust of the controversy raised by Dean Burgon's vehement and intemperate attack on it had died down, it was the textual theory of Westcott and Hort that held the field.

Such was the state of affairs in 1888. How does it stand in 1938?

The first obvious answer is that there has been a great, even an amazing, increase of material. In particular, a whole new chapter of textual history has been opened by the discovery of Greek papyrus manuscripts in Egypt. In 1888 there were no known Biblical manuscripts older than the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, which were assigned to the first half of the fourth century; and though the New Testament was in far better case, in respect both of age and quantity of evidence, than any work of classical literature, there was still a gap of some two hundred and fifty or more years between the dates of these earliest manuscripts and those of the original composition of the sacred books. Before the fourth century, the normal material on which books were written was papyrus, which under most conditions of climate is very perishable; and although during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century some few scores of papyrus manuscripts had come to light from the exceptionally dry soil of Egypt, they included only one fragment of the Bible, and that of late date. It was supposed that practically all Biblical manuscripts before the date at which vellum superseded papyrus as the principal material

for book production had perished. But within the last fifty years a number of discoveries of portions of Bible manuscripts on papyrus have been made, which carry back the story for a hundred or even two hundred years. Most of them are very small fragments, but in the Chester Beatty papyri, the discovery of which was announced in 1931, we have acquired a group of manuscripts, ranging from the second to the fourth century, which contain substantial portions of most of the books of the New Testament, and many of the Old. Of the New Testament we have one volume, of the first half of the third century, very imperfect, but containing sufficient of all four Gospels and the Acts (especially of Luke and Acts) to show the general character of the text; another, still earlier (round about A.D. 200), containing the Pauline Epistles (except the Pastorals) almost complete; and a third, rather later, containing about a third of the Book of Revelation. At once the gap between our earliest manuscripts and the original publication of the books is reduced by a hundred or a hundred and fifty years, and we still find the text substantially that which we have previously known.

Nor is this all. The discovery among the Chester Beatty collection of a manuscript of the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, in the Greek Septuagint version, which can be confidently assigned to the first half of the second century, justifies hopes that New Testament manuscripts equally early may yet be laid before us; and in point of fact a tiny scrap of the Gospel of St. John was in 1935 discovered in a parcel of papyri in the John Rylands Library at Manchester by Mr. C. H. Roberts, which is, by the general consent of those competent to judge, not later than A.D. 150. In 1888 there were still those who held the doctrine of Baur and his disciples, that the New Testament books were productions of the period A.D. 130–180, and that the Fourth Gospel was the latest among them. Now we have ocular evidence of the existence of a copy of the Gospel in provincial Egypt at a date which makes it practically certain that the traditional date of the composition of the book, towards the end of the first century, cannot be far wrong.

This is confirmed by another notable discovery. A few months earlier in 1935, Messrs. H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat, of the British Museum, published some fragments of an unknown Gospel; a narrative, that is, of our Lord's life, other than the four canonical Gospels, obviously early in date, since the writing is of the first half of the second century, and sober and straightforward in character, quite unlike the apocryphal Gospels hitherto known. Further, it has close verbal parallels with both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gosepl. Either, therefore, it is one of the narratives to which St. Luke makes reference in the preface to his Gospel, or (as most scholars seem to hold) it is a composition based upon the canonical Gospels, in which case it is a further proof of the early date at which the Fourth Gospel existed and was in accepted use.

So much for the papyri, which have added during the last fifty years a whole new province to textual criticism, and have taught us how the books of the New Testament circulated in the two centuries immediately following the age of the Apostles. But within the same period there have also been discoveries of vellum manuscripts. In 1906 Mr. Charles L. Freer, of Detroit, a great collector of Oriental paintings, acquired from a Cairo dealer four Biblical manuscripts, two of the Old Testament and two of the New. The most important of these was a copy of the four Gospels in a small hand quite unlike those of the great uncial manuscripts, yet assuredly of about the same period. It seems to come in date between the Sinaiticus and the Alexandrinus, but nearer the latter. Its text is curiously composite, showing that it must have been copied from several manuscripts of different character. In Matthew and most of Luke it ranges itself with the Alexandrinus as an early example of the common Byzantine text. In John and in the first third of Luke it is of the Alexandrian type, akin to the Vaticanus. In the first five chapters of Mark it is Western in character. In the rest of Mark it is of a type different from all of these, of which more will be said presently; and in the middle of the last twelve verses (which are now universally recognized as forming no part of the original Gospel) it inserts an additional passage, part of which was previously known from a quotation by Jerome, who says it was found in some copies, chiefly Greek ones, while the rest of it was previously unknown.

The peculiar type of text found in most of Mark links this discovery with another, and helps to build up the most important addition that has been made of late years to textual theory. So long ago as 1877 Dr. W. H. Ferrar, of Dublin, called attention to four manuscripts of the Gospels, as forming a related group with several very distinctive readings. In 1902 Dr. Kirsopp Lake indicated another group of four, and further showed that in Mark these allied themselves with the Ferrar group and a few others in offering a form of text definitely distinct from those of any of Westcott and Hort's groups. Next, in 1913, the text was published of a late and very roughly written MS. from the region of the Caucasus, known as the Koridethi Codex, which presented a somewhat similar text of Mark. Finally, in 1924,

the late Canon Streeter linked up all these separate observations, and showed that all these manuscripts formed a single family, and that readings of this type are found in the quotations in the writings of Origen during the last period of his life, when he was living at Cæsarea. To this type, therefore, he gave the name of the *Cæsarean* text, which thus takes its place alongside of the Byzantine (or Syrian), Alexandrian (or Neutral), and Western texts. Whether it originated at Cæsarea (where the library of Pamphilus was a home of textual study) or not, is another question. Lake pointed out some indications that Origen used a text of this type before he left Alexandria; and when it appeared that the Chester Beatty papyrus had in Mark a text with strong affinities with the Cæsarean, the probability was increased that the original home of this type is to be found in Egypt.

Yet another discovery, of earlier date, was that of an early Syriac translation of the Gospels. In 1892, two Cambridge ladies, Mrs. Lewis and her twin sister, Mrs. Gibson, visited the monastery of St. Catherine, beneath Mt. Sinai, where Tischendorf in 1859 had discovered the Codex Sinaiticus, and took photographs of a number of manuscripts. One of these was a palimpsest, and when it was examined at Cambridge it was discovered that the underlying text was a Syriac version of the Gospels, quite distinct from the standard Syriac Bible known as the Peshitta, but closely akin to one contained in a manuscript in the British Museum, which had been published by Dr. W. Cureton in 1858. Together, the two manuscripts constitute what is now known as the Old Syriac version, the Sinaitic MS. representing it in its earlier form, which has been somewhat modified in the direction of the Byzantine text in the Curetonian. In not a few readings the Old Syriac allies itself with the Western form found in Codex Bezæ and the Old Latin version; and at first some scholars were inclined to argue that the Western family represented the earliest type of text, originally current both in East and West, but gradually ousted successively by the Alexandrian and the Byzantine versions.

This argument brings us to the department of textual theory, as distinct from textual materials. Here, too, there has been much progress during the last fifty years, though theory almost inevitably cannot be as assured as fact. After the publication of the Revised Version in 1881, the first fight, as indicated above, was between the upholders of the 'Received' or Byzantine text, which had held the field ever since the invention of printing, and the advocates of the Revised or Westcott and Hort type of text. By the beginning of our fifty-year period this contest had been decided, in the opinion of almost all scholars, in favour of Westcott and Hort; but the next move in textual theory was a challenge to Hort's 'Neutral' on the part of the 'Western' text. It was argued that the evidence of the quotations in the early Fathers, which had been decisive against the Byzantine text, was far more often in favour of the 'Western' type than of the 'Neutral.' This contention was strongly reinforced by the appearance of the Sinaitic Syriac, and by intensive study of the Fathers, and of other versions such as the Armenian and the Georgian. Fuller study has, however, greatly weakened the validity of the Western claim. It was quite impossible to form anything like a homogeneous text out of all the materials which were confusedly classed as Western. The variants found in the Old Syriac were by no means always the same as those found in the Old Latin; and the Old Latin authorities rarely agreed among themselves. In short, it gradually became evident that the label 'Western' was being affixed to every reading earlier than the 'Syrian' version which did not appear in the 'Neutral' family. The real description of these, in Westcott and Hort terminology, would be 'non-Neutral pre-Syrian'; and they do not form a single family, but represent all that has survived from a period before the Westcott and Hort families had crystallized into definite form.

All recent discoveries and textual theorizings appear to point to some such conclusion as this. The German scholar, Hermann von Soden, who in 1902–13 produced a monumental edition of the Greek text, after segregating two classes which were practically identical with Hort's 'Syrian' and 'Neutral,' found himself left with a class containing not only the Western authorities properly so called, but a quantity of sub-groups which could by no means be forced into the semblance of a homogeneous family. They included, in fact, all the authorities which Streeter subsequently identified as forming the Cæsarean family; and this can by no possibility be amalgamated with the type of Codex Bezæ and the Old Latin. A new conspectus of the textual material seems to be necessary if we are to do justice to the new evidence which the discoveries of recent years have placed at our disposal.

The conception of the early history of the text of the New Testament to which we appear to be tending is somewhat as follows. In the early years there was every opportunity for the growth of much variety of text. There was no authoritative centre from which official copies of the several books were issued, no libraries equipped with trained scribes to produce them. No great importance was attached

to exact accuracy of text. The very idea of a New Testament had not yet come into being. The Gospels were four narratives, among others, of our Lord's life; and it did not much matter whether the exact words of Mark or Luke were there, so long as the substance of the teaching was preserved. The Acts was a story of the early evangelization of the Roman world, to which additions might harmlessly be made by some one who had information of his own on the subject. The Epistles were just so many letters written by Paul or Peter or James or John to this or that Church, each circulating separately in its own surroundings. Further, the Christian Church was scattered in a number of separate communities, at best tolerated by the Roman authorities, but often persecuted; and in times of persecution its books were sought out and destroyed.

We must therefore look on the two centuries following the age of the Apostles as a time in which the books that ultimately formed the New Testament circulated under little control. From time to time, no doubt, some bishop or scholar, noticing the divergences between different copies, might do his best to reconcile them and to remove errors; but his influence would be confined to his own neighbourhood. We know the names of some scholars who worked thus on the text of the Greek Old Testament—Origen, Eusebius, Hesychius, Lucian; and it is possible that they worked also on the New. In this way local types of text would be formed, and it is these which we seem to see in the several textual families now known to us—the Alexandrian (Hort's Neutral) in Egypt; the Cæsarean, perhaps also in Egypt and certainly in Palestine; the Western, in the Latin Churches; the Syriac, in the kingdom of Edessa; and ultimately, the Byzantine, which took possession of the churches of Antioch and Constantinople and drove out the others. And, in addition, it is natural to find in our earliest authorities a number of readings which did not find a home in any of these families.

What, then, is the net result of all these discoveries and of their study by scholars? First, the confirmation of the general integrity of the New Testament text, through the discovery of manuscripts considerably earlier than those previously known. Secondly, the realization that no one type of textual authority commands our exclusive allegiance. All except the Byzantine have early credentials, and it is not likely that the truth is always with any one of them. But this is not to say that all have equal claims on our confidence. If each is ultimately the result of some kind of editorial revision, it is obvious that much depends on the way in which the editor carried out his task. One editor might be scholarly and conscientious, having access to good MSS., and striving to restore from them the exact words of the original author. Another might be indifferent to accuracy, altering the form of narrative, incorporating passages otherwise known to him, and freely paraphrasing the actual wording. A third might revise the text in what he regarded as the interests of the reader, removing difficulties of phrase, assimilating the narrative in one Gospel to that in another, substituting familiar phrases for those less usual, and so producing an easy but somewhat colourless text. It is because the Alexandrian text appears to be the result of the first of these methods that it still, on the whole, retains the confidence of scholars; but if therefore we may feel entitled to give our general adherence to the Greek text which underlies the Revised Version, we shall do well to recognize that complete certainty in details is not obtainable, and that there may be something yet to be learned from discoveries still to be made.

The present survey has been confined strictly to the text of the New Testament. There has not been space to refer to other discoveries of much interest to Bible students, such as that of a portion of the original Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus, which throws a rather dubious light on the methods of the translators of the Septuagint; or a small fragment of Deuteronomy in Greek dating back to the second century B.C.—the earliest Biblical manuscript known, now in the John Rylands Library at Manchester; a scrap of the Diatessaron, or concordance of the four Gospels, compiled by Tatian about A.D. 170, and at one time circulating widely in Syria, discovered in the ruins of a Roman fortress on the Euphrates, destroyed in A.D. 256; one portion of the original Greek of the book of Enoch (previously known only in an Ethiopic version), found in a vellum manuscript in Egypt, which also contained portions of the apocryphal Gospel and Apocalypse of Peter; and another portion recently found among the Chester Beatty papyri; or the lost Apology of Aristides, a description and defence of Christianity addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius about the middle of the second century. All these illustrate the history of the Greek Bible and the origins of Christianity, but do not (except the Diatessaron) directly affect its text. Still less have we tried to indicate the theories of date, origin, composition, and interpretation which, from the days of Baur to those of Dibelius, have arisen, and have engaged the attention of students for a time, and then passed into oblivion. Of these there can be no end; but the text of our New Testament remains, and that text is more securely founded than ever.