

'Syriac Gospels transcribed from Sinaitic Palimpsest.'

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MANY readers of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES have waited with eager curiosity for the publication of this work. The very short time it has been in my hands has not sufficed for anything approaching to an adequate study of the Syriac text which it presents. If it 'has doubled our sources of knowledge in the darkest corner of New Testament textual criticism,'² we must ask for time to allow our eyes to grow used to the light. But the exigencies of periodical publication (at this time of the year especially) forbid delay, lest we should be negligent in directing the attention of biblical students to a work, which is certainly of very great interest, which may perhaps be found to be of surpassing value.

For about two centuries after the publication of the Syriac Version of the New Testament in 1555, one form only of translation was in use amongst scholars, the *Peshitto*, or *Simple*. Towards the close of the eighteenth century a revision of this version, made about twelve centuries before, was discovered and printed, the version now usually called the *Harkleian*. About the time that the *Harkleian* was published, parts of another version were discovered, of an entirely different type, to which the name *Palestinian* is now given. Other portions of the same version have since been recovered. Fifty years ago a manuscript of the Gospels was found, which so greatly resembled an old *Peshitto* MS., that at first it was mistaken for one. When the remarkable divergences from the *Peshitto*, which accompany the numerous passages in which the rendering is identical, were observed, it was assigned a separate place, and is known as the *Curetonian*. We have now before us an edition of another MS., with a text which is so far in agreement with the *Curetonian*, that we should be justified in calling it a second *Codex Curetonianus*, but which also presents some remarkable divergences from that famous MS.

And here we must pause to express our admiration of the care of the transcribers and the skill of the printers, in producing an edition, beautiful to

look at and easy to use. It is a reproduction of the codex, as far as this is possible in a printed book. Each page of Syriac represents a page of the MS.; the text is reproduced in the printing, line by line; and, by clever spacing of the letters, the even edge of a column of Syriac writing is preserved. Mrs. Lewis' account of the MS. is full and clear, and the notes by Mr. Harris and Mr. Burkitt will afford much help in the study of the readings. The various critical and controversial questions, to which the publication gives rise, are touched with a gentle hand; but one of the editors has discoursed on these matters in a communication to the *Guardian* of 31st October last. Mr. Burkitt's article must be taken with the book itself, in considering some of the more important bearings of the work.

The MS., like many other precious relics of ancient literature, is a palimpsest. With the upper writing we are not now concerned, except to mark the date as a starting-point for reaching the age of the original hand beneath. The date (in the Alexandrian era) appears almost certainly to be 1090, which corresponds to A.D. 778. No date has been found for the original MS. Mrs. Lewis has 'little doubt that one exists in the column' which follows the last column of St. John, but which is now illegible. Mr. Burkitt believes the writing 'cannot be later than the beginning of the fifth century, and may very likely be half a century earlier.' In determining the date of a MS., regard must be had to the material as well as the handwriting. Mrs. Lewis (p. 6, s. 2) says that the vellum was 'once stout, but is now disposed to crumble.' Stoutness of vellum is not a characteristic of great antiquity. For the most part, our oldest MSS. were written on very thin and fine skins. On the other hand, the writing, as far as one can judge from the facsimiles of two pages, in reduced size, which are given, belongs to the era of the *Curetonian* MS., which is admitted to be of the fifth century. It also resembles the hand of that famous early-dated MS. in the British Museum, Add. 12,150, of A.D. 411. Mr. Burkitt says there are no certain examples of the diacritical points, other than the plural marks. Is it possible that they are constantly lost in the crossing of the upper hand?

¹ *The Four Gospels in Syriac, transcribed from the Sinaitic Palimpsest*, by the late R. L. Bensly, and by J. R. Harris and F. C. Burkitt; with an Introduction by A. S. Lewis. Cambridge University Press.

² *Guardian*, Oct. 31, 1894.

An ancient style might exhibit few; it would be strange if there were none.

The colophon at the end of St. John is interesting as confirming the opinion, which is now accepted, that *Mepharresha* in Cureton's codex refers, not as he supposed, to St. Matthew only, as 'distinct' from the others in its text, but to the whole work. This epithet supplies an obvious connection between the two codices, which, after the editors of the one more recently discovered, we may call *Cur.* and *Sin.*¹ Other resemblances mentioned (pp. 20, 21) are less decisive. It would be easy to show that old Peshitto MSS. are divided into paragraphs, which are often identical with those of *Cur.* and *Sin.* But *Cur.* and *Sin.* do not always coincide in their divisions, and whatever linear agreement there may be is due to the accident of the agreement of the text in many passages. Now this verbal agreement is very remarkable and noteworthy, and shows that in *Cur.* and *Sin.* we have two books which must have some common origin, although in their present form they exhibit considerable variations of text. The most obvious discrepancies are the omission in *Sin.* of the names in Matt. i. 8, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, which were imported into *Cur.* against the Greek text; and the omission in *Sin.* of the last twelve verses of St. Mark, which had a place in *Cur.*

Mr. Burkitt, in the *Guardian*, has compared *Sin.* and *Cur.* in the important passage which was referred to in last month's EXPOSITORY TIMES. We add another passage, with the Peshitto text, which will enable the reader to judge of the extent of the resemblances and discrepancies which exist where no dogma is involved (Matt. xiii. 1-9):—

Cur. And on that day Jesus went out from the house, and sat him on the side of the lake. And they were gathered together unto him, a great gathering; and he went up, and sat him in the boat; and all the multitude (*lit.* gathering) was standing on the shores of the sea. And he spake with them much in parables, and said, Lo, there went out the sower to sow. And while he sowed, there was that fell on the side of the way, and there came the fowl of the heaven, and eat it. But other fell on the rock, and there was not much soil: and in the same hour it sprouted, because there was not depth of much soil. And in the shining of the sun

which was upon it, it sank; and because it had not cast root in the ground, it withered. Other fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it. But other also fell in the good ground, and gave fruits; and they increased and gave, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty. Everyone who hath ears to hear, let him hear. ∴

Sin. On that day Jesus was going out, he sat on the side (*Cur.* geneb, *Sin.* yad) of the sea. And they were gathered together unto him, great gatherings, and he went up, and sat him in the boat; and all the multitude (*lit.* gathering) was standing on the shores of the sea. And he was speaking with them much in parables, and was saying, Lo, there went out the sower to sow seed. And while he sowed, there was that fell on the side of the way, and there came winged creatures, picked it. And there was that fell on the rock, and because it was coming up, and there was not much soil, in the same hour (*Cur.* bo b'shatha, *Sin.* bar shathoh) it sprouted. And in the shining of the sun, which was upon it, it sank; and because it had not cast root, it withered. And other fell among the thorns; and the thorns came forth with it, and choked it. But other also fell in the good ground, and gave fruits, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty. Everyone who hath an ear, let him hear. ∴

Pesh. But on that day Jesus went out from the house, and sat on the side (yad) of the sea. And they were gathered unto him, great gatherings, so that he went up, sat him in the ship, and all the multitude (gathering) was standing on the shore of the sea. And much was he speaking with them in parables, and saying, Lo, there went out the sower, that he might sow. And while he sowed, there was that fell on the side of the way, and there came the fowl, and eat it. And other fell on the rock, where there was not much earth; and in the same hour (bar sh., as *Sin.*) it sprouted, because there was not depth of ground. But when the sun arose, it was burned; and because it had not root, it withered. And other fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it. And other fell in the good ground, and gave fruits, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty. He who hath ears that he may hear, let him hear. ∴

We have only one MS. *Cur.* and one *Sin.*, but of the Peshitto text we have many; several little inferior in antiquity to *Cur.* and *Sin.*, more than one quite as old. If they contained *variae lectiones* intimately related to the readings of *Cur.* and of *Sin.*, these would help us in tracing the origin of the differences between the Peshitto and the Curetonian types. Unfortunately the variants, as a rule, are of a different kind. It is true that in the above passage, the variant *to sow for that he might sow* is found, supported chiefly by Nestorian MSS; but the other *variae lectiones*, collected from five-and-twenty authorities, have no connexion with the differences between *Cur.* and *Sin.* and *Pesh.* One, for example, is *much people for great multitudes*. Several, as is usually the case with Peshitto *variae lectiones*, are the merest trifles, and do not affect the sense.

¹ Yet it seems a pity to employ an abbreviation which already indicates something else in New Testament criticism, and even short words are inconvenient in notes on readings. Some time ago, in prospect of the possible discovery of other MSS. like Cureton's, I suggested that they should be designated *Cur.* 1, 2, 3, etc.

Yet, though evidence fails us, the problem of supreme importance is to account for these *differences* between the two types of text. The *resemblances* between *Cur.*, *Sin.*, and old Peshitto MSS., the identity of text in many passages, speak for themselves. All are, more or less, copies of the Syriac translation which had been made in ancient days; but why is the common text interrupted perpetually by some difference—an addition, an omission, the substitution of some other term, or varied phrase? Two answers are given.

1. Some have sought an explanation in the known history of the Latin Bible; and because Jerome revised it in the closing decades of the fourth century, have concluded that the Syrians did the same at the same epoch. It is matter of history that at a later period the Syriac New Testament underwent two successive revisions. These were the works of Philoxenus and Thomas of Harkel, and were undertaken, it would seem, in imitation of the work of Jerome. Diplomatic evidence carries the text of the Peshitto into the decades which closely follow the days of Ephraim and Aphraates. Mr. Burkitt seems persuaded that those writers do not bear distinct testimony to the prevalence of the Peshitto text. His opinion is not shared by all, and, as it seems to us, some who write on this question have not apprehended the point of the inquiry. We want to know the significance of the divergences of *Cur.-Sin.* from *Pesh.* Mr. Woods, who is adduced by Mr. Burkitt, expressly declares that the great bulk of Mar Ephraim's quotations are in exact or practical agreement with the Peshitto. Of Aphraates, indeed, he says that his quotations generally approximate far more closely to the Curetonian than to the Peshitto; but he confesses that he had made only a partial examination of the quotations.¹ Again, Mr. Burkitt's reference to *Judas Thomas* shows that the translator of that work (whose date is matter of opinion) made a large, if only partial, use of the Peshitto. Now, it is not wonderful that Syrian and Persian writers should have made use of pre-Peshitto renderings and extra-Peshitto readings, but it would be strange indeed to find that a revision of a vernacular version had obtained such authority in the Syrian Church, that in about half a century it had become the ordinary source of citation. In the West, which is less conservative than the East, the Vulgate did not win its way so quickly, although it was supported

¹ Rev. F. H. Woods in *Studia Biblica*, iii. Essay iv.

by the commendation of the Chair of St. Peter. Thus, if it be true to fact that the Peshitto was constructed on the basis of the Curetonian type, we seem shut up to the conclusion that this revision was made at an extremely early period; and, guided by the landmarks which others have set up, we return to the critical position at which we have before arrived, and which we have more than once stated.²

Professor Sanday has justly insisted on the importance of the history of a document towards the recovery of the true text. If we could trace the history of *Cur.* and *Sin.*, we should go far towards accounting for the differences between them and the Peshitto. It would greatly help us if we could localise them. It has been suggested that the rendering in *Sin.* (Matt. iii. 4), 'honey of the hill,' points to an origin in a mountainous land. This suggestion should be followed up. We know now that there were several Syriac Bibles. Not to speak of the Old Testament, the Western Syrians had their Harkleian, which was not used in the East. Another branch of the Church had their own peculiar version, which provisionally we call Palestinian. To meet what local needs, for the support of what dogmas, for the benefit of what heretics, were *Cur.* and *Sin.* transcribed? Why, besides the matter which they have in common with *Pesh.*, are there such changes, perhaps corruptions? For no one believes that the forms of text they now present have descended from remote antiquity without modification.

It may be added that there is no comparison between the relation of Old Latin and Vulgate MSS. and that which exists between *Cur.*, *Sin.*, and Peshitto MSS. Such an authority as Mr. White³ states that fragments of the old versions found their way into probably all existing MSS. of the Vulgate. In Peshitto MSS. a reading of the Curetonian type may be found here and there. It would be contrary to facts to assert that *Pesh.* MSS. are, in any sense, corrupted by *Cur.-Sin.* readings. The origin of the Peshitto is lost for the present; but the wonderful discoveries of our age encourage the hope that the dark past of early Syriac literary history may be illuminated some day. It is not denied, while it cannot be proved, that the Peshitto had a precursor, but that precursor is neither *Cur.* nor *Sin.* This is important,

² *E.g.* in *Studia Biblica*, iii. Essay iv. s. vi.

³ In *Scrivener's Introduction*, last ed. vol. ii. p. 58.

for it forbids us to quote every variation from the Peshitto as an 'old Syriac reading.' Writers have hitherto done so in deference to a theory about Cureton's MS. Now there appears on the scene another codex, which, with a courtly compliment full well deserved, has been called the Lewis Gospels. But *Cod. Curetonianus* and *Cod. Ludovicus* are often in conflict. Which is the primitive reading in such cases?

2. Those who have not admitted that the Curetonian was the precursor of the Peshitto, have contended that it is an interpolated and corrupted codex. What was said of *Cur.* would apply, if true, to *Sin.* The corruptions may date from a very early period, for the Greek text suffered much in its earliest years. Of the four old uncials \aleph A B C, three must be corrupt, if all are not, for their readings are in constant conflict.

As space forbids an adequate discussion of the many aspects of what is confessedly an intricate problem, we must conclude with one point, which is essential. There was reason to suspect that *Cur.* had been modified in the interests of dogma: ¹ it is obvious on the face of the work that *Sin.* is heretical. At Matt. i. 16 we read, 'Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus'; at ver. 25, 'and he married his wife, and she bare him a son.' The orthodoxy of the latter passage may be saved by reading *loh* for *leh*; and it has been suggested that a touch of the chemical reagent might reveal the diacritical dot, which would change *leh* to *loh*. But Mr. Burkitt says there are few, or no certain examples of the use of this dot. It is not very likely that one would appear just where we want it; and it is not necessary, for we may acquiesce in Mrs. Lewis' remark: ² 'We must remember that our Lord was born in wedlock, and that we are expressly told that Joseph was his supposed father.'

The orthodoxy of the other passage can hardly be saved except by emendation. If we suppose that in the space between *begat* and *Jesus* there lurks a *th*, now invisible, the verb becomes feminine. It is true that it is rarely used of the woman, but instances are given in the *Thesaurus Syriacus*.

¹ See Dr. Waller's study of this question in Scrivener, ii. pp. 21 f. Mr. Rendel Harris gently criticises what he considers an anachronism. There is none. As I understand Dr. Waller, he would contend that *Cur.* was subsequent to the Helvidian controversy.

² I quote, by permission, from a letter received from Mrs. Lewis.

Further, it is suggested that the translator had before him $\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\sigma\epsilon$ (which also is sometimes used of the mother) applied to Mary, in the Greek MS., and that he mistook it. Mrs. Lewis adds: 'I am convinced that our codex is not the work of a heretic, for I cannot believe that anyone who doubted the divinity of our Lord would have left so many passages untouched which assert it strongly.' But what passage in the Gospels is comparable in distinctness of dogmatic enunciation to the story of the Incarnation? If that be discredited, an heretical explanation of other places is not impossible.

Mr. Burkitt argues for the early date of the 'Old Syriac,' as he would call it, and for its priority to Tatian's *Diatessaron*, from, *inter alia*, the dogmatic passages in *Sin.* Therefore he holds that those passages are not corruptions in the *Sin.* MS., but belong to the early form of the text. This heretical text, then, was the parent of the orthodox Syriac New Testament. Now, it is true that Tatian's *Diatessaron*, the work of one who lay under the imputation of heresy, was much used in the early Syrian Church; but Mr. Burkitt's reference to the account of the birth in the *Diatessaron* shows that Tatian was orthodox on the question of the Virgin birth. The popularity of the *Diatessaron* in the Early Church is not so remarkable; but wonderful indeed would it be if it were true that the Syriac Church provided for her children nothing better than a New Testament which starts with the denial of the Incarnation! We do not say that this is impossible; but so strange a state of things must be illustrated, and the position made certain. Mrs. Lewis would save the character of *Cod. Sin.*; but in that case Mr. Burkitt's argument, derived from its false teaching, falls to the ground.

We are aware that there are not wanting those who would see marks of hoar antiquity in the *Sin.* text of Matt. i. 19-25, for reasons very different from those which weigh with Mr. Burkitt. To them a rationalistic explanation of the coming into the world of the Saviour is necessarily primitive and true. The miracle of the Incarnation is the fond dream of a later age. But to the Catholic Christian the orthodox story is necessarily the more ancient. The faith was once delivered to the saints; then came heresy. To us, it is hard to understand how an heretical translation could have become the orthodox Vulgate. We still decline to employ the leading title 'Old

Syriac,' which, in the form of 'Syr. vt.,' Mr. Burkitt so lovingly sprinkles over his notes, because we think, as hitherto used, the word is misleading; but if, out of the fifth-century MSS. *Cur.* and *Sim.*, and others yet to come, we can reconstruct the earliest form of the Syriac New Testament, we shall welcome a valuable auxiliary in support of the orthodox Canon, and a most important witness to the

Greek text. For that which lies beyond the point to which, as we hold, we can trace the Peshitto text, must lie where the last echoes of apostolic teaching have hardly died away. Whatever the results may be, our hearty thanks are due to all who bore a part, for their perseverance in recovering this treasure, and their skill in presenting it for our use.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

(The Prices of the Books mentioned below will generally be found in the Advertisement pages.)

I.

THE UNSEEN LIFE. BY THE REV. F. WARBURTON LEWIS, B.A. (*Allenson.* Crown 8vo, pp. 128.) To emphasise old truth is a clearer duty than to seek out new. For it is truer of truth than it is of wine that the old is better. Moreover, the discipline is more profitable for ourselves. Anyone can follow the multitude to say startling things; it is the man who has governed his spirit who can tell the old story over again and make it seem as good as new. There are some things in Mr. Lewis' volume to which assent must be given with hesitation. He says, for example, in his first sermon, that 'Jesus did not pretend to love everybody,' that He laid no command on His followers to love any but their friends, and that their 'friends' are those whom 'God has placed next them in life,' by which he means wife, children, husband, brother. But a little knowledge will put these matters right, and they are not very numerous. Mr. Lewis has the courage, or the good hap, to say old things over again, to say them pleasantly, and even impressively, and for that his work is well worth publishing.

HIS STAR AND VESPER BELLS. BY HENRY PUTMAN. (*Allenson.* Small 4to, pp. 45.) If we cannot have *mens sana in corpore sano*, let us have *mens sana*. If we cannot have smooth rhythm and true thought, let us have true and happy thought. We have it so here, and it is the more refreshing that in modern poetry it is so largely all the other way. And yet the rhythm is sometimes well managed too.

THE COMPREHENSIVE TEACHER'S BIBLE. (*Bagster.* Various sizes and bindings.) There was a time when no other name was coupled with Teachers' Bibles than the name of Bagster. Other great firms have entered into serious competition since then, and we no longer reckon it a matter of course that we must go for the best possible Bible to Bagsters'. But the firm is still a Bible-publishing firm, and even the universities, with their incomparable resources, have never driven it off the field, or out of the Christian worker's estimation.

And now Samuel Bagster & Sons are ready with a new edition of their *Comprehensive Teacher's Bible* and their *Comprehensive Helps to Bible Study*. It is the newness of the latter that makes the former new. The Bible is the same as before. And we do not know that any other publisher has improved upon it, in its ordinary sizes at least, whether in respect of typology or marginal references. The *Helps*, when examined, prove to be the work of scholars, though no scholar's name is given. Their aim is to become a mouth and wisdom to those whose attainments are more spiritual than intellectual. Therefore it is not surprising that in all critical matters they abide by the old ways; but it is pleasant to find that the decision is made with knowledge and without bitterness. Some features are new, notably the coloured illustrations. But these are more ornamental than useful. The Concordance, however, is both new and useful exceedingly. It is cleverly chosen, sensibly arranged, and accurately printed.