

**The Text of the New Testament—Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration**, by Bruce M. Metzger. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 268; 42s. 0d.

Written 'with an eye to the needs of the student', this book is one which every serious translator of the New Testament Scriptures should 'possess' in the fullest possible sense of the word. It is usually considered that the field of textual criticism belongs exclusively to the specialist, but he would be an unusual translator indeed who, called to spend laborious years with the text of Scripture, did not find himself intellectually involved in the problem of the nature and origin of the text before him, the marvel of its preservation and transmission, and the issue of its integrity. If ever there was a group of 'students' in need of help in this whole field it is that of Bible translators. It should be said at once that Dr Metzger has rendered them all a great service in the writing of this work.

The book consists of three parts and eight chapters. Part One deals with 'The Materials for the Textual Criticism of the New Testament'. The first chapter tells how ancient books were made, describing their materials and form, and the methods used for their writing and reproduction. It goes on to explain the special features of the ancient manuscripts, showing how at an early stage scholars and scribes introduced various devices to make the text more intelligible to the reader and manageable for worship and liturgy in the service of the Church. These the author describes in familiar idiom as 'helps for readers'. They cover the run of chapter divisions, titles, inter-gospel references (the Eusebian canons), introductions, commentaries, glosses, matters of punctuation, artistic adornment—in short all the features that are found in the ancient material. This is followed by a brief statistical statement showing what a wealth of ancient manuscript evidence is available for the New Testament as compared with any other body of ancient literature from the Graeco-Roman world.

The second chapter is headed 'Important Witnesses to the Text of the New Testament', and in three subdivisions it introduces the reader to the major groups of textual materials: the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the ancient versions of the New Testament, and quotations from the early Fathers. The method in each case is to choose some of the most important exemplars and describe briefly their significant characteristics. The Chester Beatty and Bodmer papyri provide the material of the first group. The uncials are represented by the three famous manuscripts Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus and Vaticanus, all of which receive more detailed treatment; no fewer than 45 uncials are, however, referred to in this section, which serves not only to set before the student most of the familiar descriptive terminology commonly used by scholars for purposes of classification, but also to illustrate the variety of types of uncial manuscripts (diglots, palimpsests, luxury editions, etc.), and the 'schools' to which they belong. This is followed by a section on the minuscules, mostly of the mediaeval period but showing their various family relationships to earlier types of text and their great importance as a group in the task of establishing the original.

The second section of this chapter deals with the many ancient versions or translations of the Greek text, as the early Church moved out into the

world. It assesses the significance of most of the main exemplars and their relevance to the task of the textual critic, according them a place of very considerable if secondary importance. Modern translators will read this section with special interest, illustrating as it does the perennial character of many of the problems which still confront us in the contemporary translational situation. 'Latin has no definite article; Syriac cannot distinguish between the Greek aorist and perfect tenses; Coptic lacks the passive voice and must use a circumlocution.' All this will strike a chord with many!

The third section outlines the contribution of the Fathers and lists the main sources of patristic evidence for the restoration of the text, with a salutary reminder of the sometimes precarious nature of such evidence, depending as it frequently does on fallible human memory and subject always to a wide variety of contingencies.

Part Two outlines, in two chapters, 'The History of New Testament Textual Criticism as reflected in Printed Editions of the Greek Testament', from the first printed Greek text of the Complutensian Polyglot (1514 ?) to the most recent editions of the Württembergische Bibelanstalt (Stuttgart) and the B.F.B.S., London, 1958. The first outstanding peak in this historical process was the establishing of the *Textus Receptus* as the standard text of the New Testament, on which all the major western European translations prior to 1881 were based. Dr Metzger's account of the various processes involved in the evolution of this text, and especially of the inadequacy of its basis in late mediæval manuscripts, provides much food for thought for those who today still cling to the textual authority of many of the major sixteenth-century European translations which were made from it. The latter part of the chapter shows, however, how scholars soon got to work on the task of hunting down and examining thoroughly all accessible manuscripts for alternative readings, and in so doing opened up the way for a new science of Textual Criticism. The contributions of Walton, Ussher, John Fell, John Mill, Wells, Bentley, Mace and especially Bengel all come under notice. Copious references in footnotes amplify the necessarily brief survey given in the text so that both the ordinary reader and the student can gain from this section all that they need.

A further chapter then takes up the story from the latter part of the eighteenth century, when J. J. Griesbach, Professor of New Testament at Jena (1775–1812), began to lay down scientific principles for the evaluation of textual evidence, produced editions based on them and thus began to undermine the hitherto unchallenged textual authority of the *Textus Receptus*. This leads on to a brief account of the contributions of others working on similar lines, especially Lachmann, Tischendorf and Tregelles, and thence to the work of Alford, Westcott and Hort, and other English 'Revisers' of 1881. The latter receive a somewhat fuller and more detailed treatment as befits an epoch in textual scholarship and research, the results of which are still operating in the approach and thinking of modern scholars. The chapter concludes with references to the 'magnificent failure' represented by von Soden's monumental attempt to reclassify the manuscript evidence and produce a definitive edition of the Greek text based on derived principles; the contributions of the Roman Catholic scholars Merk and Bover; the

widely-known series of editions produced by Nestle and now continued by Aland, and finally the 1958 edition produced by the B.F.B.S. and jointly edited by Erwin Nestle and Professor Kilpatrick.

Part Three deals in four chapters with 'The Application of Textual Criticism to the Text of the New Testament', with first a brief historical account of the origins of textual criticism as a scholarly discipline; then a fuller account of the main phases of the development of textual criticism as a science, with their bearing on the production of so-called 'scientific' texts. It is in the final two chapters, however, that the translator will find himself most at home with the subject matter. For here, with admirable clarity and adequate illustration, are set forth those manifold causes of error in the transmission of the New Testament text which, to this day, continue to be the bugbear of all who toil long hours with Bible manuscript or type-script. They are succinctly classified as errors arising from faulty eyesight and from faulty hearing, errors of the mind, and errors of judgement. There follows another section which deals with changes involving spelling and grammar, harmonistic corruptions, conflation of readings, doctrinal considerations, etc. All of these are matters which keep the manuscript examiners of the Bible Societies endlessly busy in their tireless task of correction, in all the innumerable languages in which modern versions are being prepared.

The final chapter sets forth the basic criteria for the evaluation of variant readings, and the book concludes with a selection of illustrative analyses of certain passages to show how these criteria are applied in the quest for the most probable readings.

The book is furnished with an Appendix in which the papyri of the New Testament are fully listed, with information about their source, origin, date and present location. This is followed by a useful bibliography, a general index, an index of New Testament passages, and an admirable series of plates.

Published by the Oxford University Press, the print and format are all that could be desired. It would perhaps seem churlish to draw attention to an odd printer's error on p. 103, where the author's word 'eclectic' appears mysteriously as 'electric'. But even this is not out of place in a book dealing so competently with variant readings!

This is not only an important book for those who have a professional interest in the subject; it is a book which will give pleasure to all who take an intelligent interest in the text of the Greek New Testament. Translators may find themselves in both these groups—and all of them will agree that Dr Metzger has enriched their libraries in no small way.

WILFRED J. BRADNOCK

**The Pelican Gospel Commentaries: St Matthew**, by J. C. Fenton, pp. 487, 7s. 6d.; **St Mark**, by D. E. Nineham, pp. 477, 7s. 6d.; **St Luke**, by G. B. Caird, pp. 271, 6s. 0d. (Penguin Books, London, 1964.)

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