

“GUILELESS WORKMANSHIP”

CLYO JACKSON

STUDENTS of the New Testament acknowledge freely their indebtedness to the “guileless workmanship” of the Reverend Fenton J. A. Hort; that was his word—guileless—and his work was that. The Westcott and Hort Text is on every New Testament scholar’s desk. Their reconstruction, which differs so from the generally received text of the day, was published in May, 1881, five days before the Revised Version was presented to Convocation. After nearly half a century, that edition is more generally accepted than ever as presenting “exactly the original words of the New Testament, so far as they can now be determined from surviving documents”; and this general acceptance is in spite of the many additions to the manuscript evidence which the years have unearthed. The English revision has not fared so well, as the many private ventures in translating tacitly indicate. But while the WH Greek Text is accepted generally, it is also accepted impersonally. Hort’s life was that of a country clergyman and scholar, without outward incident, and the centenary of his birth last year passed without notice. The story of his uneventful life is encouragement to all good workmen.

* * * * *

In the Anglican communion in the last half of the nineteenth century, three names will be remembered together, Lightfoot, Westcott, and Hort, just as in other Churches those of Morgan, Moffatt, and Scott are grouped in our day. The scholar needs the spur of companionship; “iron sharpeneth iron”, and so does the college mate keep one from atrophy.

It was about 1845, when Oxford University and the Church of England generally were sadly shaken by the Tractarian Movement and especially by Newman’s defection to the Roman Church, that these three young men were undergraduates in Cambridge in training for holy orders. Tübingen theology was beginning to increase the religious unrest among cultured English folk. To stimulate and guide the intellectual and religious life of the parish clergy, the three projected a joint commentary, and they partitioned the whole of the New Testament among themselves; to Lightfoot was assigned the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews, and to Westcott

the Johannine literature. Hort was to do the remainder, or, as he called it, the "historico-Judaic writings" (*Synoptics, Acts, James, Peter, Jude*). This, as a formally common work, was abandoned with the years, but the plan and purpose were never lost sight of.

Hort began his work on the Gospels about 1860, the very year Darwin's *Origin of Species* disturbed the quiet of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and the assurance of ecclesiastics and theologians the world over. On March 10, 1860, in a note to Westcott, he asks: "Have you read Darwin?" and he adds: "In spite of difficulties I am inclined to think it unanswerable. In any case, it is a treat to read such a book." The same day he wrote to the publisher, Mr. A. Macmillan, to see if he could use an article on Darwin in *Macmillan's Magazine*. What he proposed was "mainly a clear popular statement of the various facts of the argument put in a different form and order, and partly criticisms and additional illustrations." Hort's liking for botany was second only to his love for the New Testament; at his death the obituary notice in the *Journal of Botany* for February, 1893, read, in part, thus: "Forty years ago Hort might have been styled one of the rising hopes of the Cambridge school of botanists." Mr. Macmillan encouraged Hort to write on the *Origin of Species*, but the article was never finished: his other interest absorbed all his time and energy. On April 29, 1860, he wrote to Lightfoot suggesting that as an earlier scheme for a joint commentary had failed, the three divide the books of the New Testament among themselves. Lightfoot demurred at the apportionment detailed above, whereupon Hort sent this trenchant letter under date of May 1, 1860:

I am extremely obliged to you for expressing plainly your doubt about my taking the Synoptic Gospels. Westcott gave me no hint of it at Harrow, and it is clearly essential that there should be no misunderstandings at starting. I will therefore say my say with equal plainness.

My first feeling on reading your letter was that it might be better for me to withdraw at once. The scheme in its present form is yours. It takes up and meets an old scheme of Westcott's, long in abeyance, but never relinquished. If I take part in it, it will be by your permission, not as an independent projector. If your idea is to have an uniform commentary, which shall demonstrate that the final results of accurate and honest criticism do not disturb "orthodox" assumptions, you are quite right not to admit a coadjutor who cannot feel certain of having equal good luck. . . . I should shrink from transferring myself to other books of the N. T. in your scheme on the ground that you could not trust me with the Gospels. . . .

On second thoughts it seems rash to call off without ascertaining whether we really are at variance. . . . I am distinctly convinced that *any* view of the Gospels, which distinctly and consistently recognizes for them a natural and historical origin (whether under a special divine superintendence or not), and assumes that they did not drop down ready-made from heaven, must and will be "startling" to an immense proportion of educated English people. . . .

If you make a decided conviction of the absolute infallibility of the N. T. practically a *sine qua non* for co-operation, I fear I could not join you, even if you were willing to forget your fears about the origin of the Gospels. I am most anxious to find the N. T. infallible, and have a strong sense of the divine purpose guiding all its parts; but I cannot see how the exact limits of such guidance can be ascertained except by unbiassed *a posteriori* criticism. . . .

I do not think that I should be rash in deliberate print, least of all in a commentary on the Bible. At the same time, it would be mere working in fetters to me to attempt an apologetic commentary as such. . . . Forgive my saying that it seems to me the truest wisdom to think as little as possible about disarming suspicion. . . .

Hort closed the letter with a post-script: "As I was writing the last words, a note came from Westcott. He, too, mentions having fears which he now pronounces "groundless" on the strength of our last conversation, in which he discovered that I did "recognize Providence" in Biblical writings. Most strongly I recognize it; but I am not prepared to say that it necessarily involves absolute infallibility. So I still await judgment."

Judgment was favourable, and with enthusiasm the three took up again the half-abandoned work on the commentary. Light-foot and Westcott both produced substantial volumes to mark their contribution to the general scheme, and these are still most useful books. But the commentary on the Synoptic Gospels was never written.

Hort's first task was one of text. At the time *Mark* was not regarded axiomatically as the earliest of the Gospels; the judgment of scholars as to the origin of these brief writings had reached no unanimity. The influential Baur, of Tübingen, had already published his views, and he placed Mark last. In conformity with his philosophy of history, he maintained that early Christianity had developed into the catholic Church of the second century by reason of the conflict between Jewish and Gentile schools; Matthew's was accordingly the earliest of the three, reflecting the most original and trustworthy source, the Petrine or Judaic wing; Luke's was the antithesis, Pauline and anti-Judaic. Mark's Gospel was the

last, a colourless synthesis effect in the second century Church. Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, which George Eliot translated into English in 1846, had been built up without any careful criticism of the sources; in fact, regarding the Synoptic problem there was then “a confused welter of the most various hypotheses.” The task which Hort had undertaken involved the closest examination of the three Gospels to discover, if possible, their inter-relation. In the solution of that primary problem for his commentary the settlement of a critical text to be used was imperatively the first consideration. For the elucidation of the *Epistle to the Galatians* or of the *Fourth Gospel* the question of text was of less significance; but in the effort to recover the relation which the Synoptic Gospels bear to each other, Hort found he could not proceed until this “secondary and negative” work of textual criticism had been done.

His interest in the text of the New Testament was of long standing; as early as 1851, when only twenty-three, he wrote: “I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous *Textus Receptus*.” Two years later, to the same Rev. J. Ellerton, his life-long friend, he told of the plan to publish a text: “He (Westcott) and I are going to edit a Greek text of the New Testament some two or three years hence, if possible. Our object is to supply clergymen generally, schools, etc., with a portable Greek Testament which shall not be disfigured with Byzantine corruptions.”

The “two or three years hence” stretched out to nearly thirty. From 1857 to 1872 Hort was vicar of St. Ippolyts, and his parish work he has described vividly: “Practically we have five villages; I teach at the Sunday School at St. Ippolyts, which precedes the service. . . . The churches are both rather good-looking and tidy; of course, there is only one service each Sunday at each church. The morning attendance is but so-so; the afternoon has much increased, and is now extremely good, especially in labouring men; the women don't come much. Hardly anybody comes to Communion. We have a doleful barrel organ at each church; yesterday we arranged to make our first public rush into chants; and as luck would have it, the grinder of our barrel was laid up with a bad leg. So we boldly had both chants and psalms without organ, with agreeable success. . . .”

During these years Tischendorf was busily engaged; his printed editions of the N. T. with the variant readings of available manuscripts were particularly valuable to Hort. In 1857 he asked of Macmillan: “Please always send any fresh piece of Tischendorf

by post as soon as it comes, without waiting for a parcel:" and he adds: "I am getting more and more convinced of the necessity of Westcott's and my work." In 1859 the collaborators adopted the plan of preparing the next by correspondence; each—Westcott, assistant-master at Harrow, and Hort in the vicarage at St. Ippolyts—would work out separately his own results, and then submit them to the other's judgment. That year *Codex Sinaiticus* was discovered, and Hort wrote: "Tischendorf's new discovery may delay our N. T. greatly, as Westcott wishes (not I) to wait for it; but there can be little doubt of its importance. . . ." "Almost every day I see reason to shrink from accepting or rejecting readings of slender but early authority in any of the Gospels." And it was at this time that the revised plan for the commentary was made. His acquaintance with the materials for the reconstruction of the text was then such that in 1860 he wrote to Lightfoot: "It sounds an arrogant thing to say, but there are many cases in which I would not admit the competence of any to judge a decision of mine on a textual matter, who was only an amateur, and who had not had considerable experience in forming a text."

Of the next few years there is little to tell: "Text must go on till done" (1862). "I am not likely to be ready for two or three years" (1863). "By way of work I do nothing but *St. James* and the N. T. text" (1864). "Just now I am staggering under advancing N. T. text" (1869).

In 1870 Lightfoot, Westcott, and Hort were all invited to join the New Testament Revision Company; this, like the plan for the commentary, was an added motive to complete the text. The following year Westcott and Hort published their *Text of the Gospels, for the Use of the Revisers*. To his friend Ellerton, Hort wrote: "I wish I could have sent you one; but we sent to no private friends, unless they had some special claim as critics or scholars. Macmillan rightly perhaps cut down this purely private issue to a small number; and the N. T. Company, with foreign and American scholars, left only a small proportion for England." Their text of the remainder of the New Testament was placed in the same way in the hands of the members of the Company of Revisers in successive instalments from 1871 to 1876. Rev. F. H. A. Scrivener, who was also a member of the Revision, championed the cause of the text used in the King James version; accordingly the textual changes by the Revisers were not hastily made, and none was adopted without a two-thirds majority. "We have had", Hort wrote to his wife in 1871, "some stiff battles to-day in Revision, though without any ill feeling, and usually with good success."

After running the gauntlet of the Revision Company this private edition of Hort's provisional text was later corrected in details, and occasional modifications of readings were introduced into the published work of 1881.

The New Testament in the Original Greek, as their title page read, left little to be desired in regard to careful workmanship. Hort's son says: "He spent many hours, magnifying glass in hand, in search of broken letters and other minute blemishes;" and again: "It is said, with what truth I do not know, that Hort was greatly disturbed because an accent was unaccountably missing from the final proof, which he could prove had been in the previous one; the thin projection of the type had broken off in the printing." Half-paragraphs, capitals, punctuation, and even unusual spellings of common words all had meaning.

While the text of the Revisers is not identical with WH, the changes made were those proposed by these two textual scholars. In two particulars were these changes most noticeable to the average reader of the translation. The old printing of paragraph indentation for each verse—a practice which, through the centuries, had come to be invested with a halo of sanctity as the only proper way to print Scripture—was abandoned. And although the figure to each verse was retained, actual paragraph divisions were made, as in other literature.

Other changes, less obvious but more significant, are the variations in the text from that of the King James version. Some verses, e. g., are not included in the revised translation of 1881: *Matthew* 18: 11, 23: 14, 27: 49b; *Mark* 7: 16, 11: 26, 15:28; *Luke* 9: 55b, 17: 36, 23:17; *John* 5: 4; *Acts* 8: 27; the doxology to the Lord's Prayer in *Matthew* 6: 13—these are some of the omissions from the text used in the 1611 rendering. But Hort thought that other passages ought also to be omitted: *Mark* 16: 9 to 20, *Luke* 22: 19b and 20, and *John* 7: 53 to 8: 11 are notable illustrations. For the study of the synoptic problem such changes in text are important. When asked to recommend the best books for that study, Hort replied: "I should advise you to take your Greek New Testament, and get your own view of the facts first of all."

He removed from his country parish to Cambridge in 1872, and his life thereafter to its close in 1892 was inseparably bound up with the university and the teaching of theology. When the Revised Version appeared in 1881, it met with vigorous criticism, especially in regard to the text adopted. The vulnerable point, however, was the rendering: words, rather than ideas, were done into English, a mistake which the papyri finds since are correcting.

The WH Greek New Testament had been published just before the N. T. Revision, and in the autumn of the same year Hort was able, under pressure, to complete the *Introduction and Appendix*. This companion volume to the Greek text was a compressed statement of the textual theory underlying the WH reconstruction, and though both editors express themselves as responsible for the "principles, arguments, and conclusions set forth", the writing devolved upon Hort alone. In the criticism of the new English version, Westcott and Hort were treated as the chief authors of the mischief; they chose not to reply.

Two other Greek texts of the N. T. are easily accessible to the student: Souter's, and Nestle's. Souter's (1910) is the Greek which was done into English by the Revisers, and differs materially from WH in spelling and text. Nestle's is an amalgam, prepared for the Bible Society of Wurttemberg in 1898 from Tischendorf, WH, and Weiss; the readings adopted are those in which at least two of these agree; this is the text now issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society. After the War, Professor Carl S. Patton visited Harnack, and heard from him of the sad condition of German theological students; Dr. Patton asked how American students could help, and Harnack replied: "Let them send us a few Westcott and Hort Greek Testaments." And Hort in his day could say with a smile that his work was better known on the continent and in America than at home. Any advance in the recovery of the original words of the New Testament must start—it would seem—from Hort.

He regarded the text as only the prolegomena to the task he had set himself when, with Lightfoot and Westcott, he planned the commentary. At the death of Lightfoot, Hort wrote to Westcott in the first days of 1890 thus: "It is humiliating to me to think that one of our three has passed away without my having 'produced' as yet anything of my portion of the joint work undertaken 29-30 years ago. . . . I can only hope that, if life is spared, the new year thus begun may be less barren."