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NOTES AND STUDIES

THE PRIMITIVE TEXT OF THE ACTS

NEW TESTAMENT scholars have long awaited the critical edition of the Acts by Mr A. C. Clark, Corpus Professor of Latin at Oxford, which the Clarendon Press has just published.[1]

The successful revolution carried through in 1881 by Westcott and Hort against the accepted view of the text of the New Testament rested on three simple propositions :—

(1) The Textus Receptus, although substantially the text found in the vast majority of manuscripts, must be completely set aside. Partly from internal considerations, partly because its characteristic readings do not occur in the scriptural quotations of early writers, it is seen to be an editorial recension—probably that made by Lucian of Antioch about A.D. 300.

(2) A modern critic, therefore, need only consider seriously the reading of that small minority of manuscripts, the texts of which can be shown from quotations in the fathers to have circulated before that date.

(3) Among these few manuscripts, B, the Codex Vaticanus, is of unique importance and authority. It is the best representative of a text which, from its steady avoidance of errors to right hand or to the left, may be styled 'Neutral'. Accordingly a critical edition of the New Testament will be *substantially* a reproduction of the text of that manuscript.

Professor Clark attacks the same problem, so far as the text of the Acts is concerned—armed with the discoveries of the intervening half-century, and after more than twenty years concentrated work of his own. In effect he applies to the text of Westcott and Hort the principles which they applied to the Textus Receptus—with an analogous result. He argues, on very similar grounds, that the text found in B and its little band of supporters also represents an editorial recension ; and that therefore a critical text must be based on the so-called 'Western' text found in D, the Codex Bezae, and its still smaller band of supporters. For, few as are the surviving manuscript authorities for the 'Western' text, as Hort himself pointed out, the evidence of early versions and quotations shews that it was 'the most widely spread text in ante-Nicene times', and 'texts of this kind were at least dominant in most churches of both East and West'. Westcott and Hort dared to defy the *auctoritas*

[1] *The Acts of the Apostles.* A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes on Selected Passages by Albert C. Clark, Corpus Professor of Latin in the University of Oxford. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1933.)

of the traditional printed text and the admittedly unanimous voice of the great mass of manuscripts and frame their text on B—so successfully that their text became a modern Textus Receptus. On similar principles Prof. Clark defies the *auctoritas* of their text, which has become for our generation the traditional printed text, and frames a new critical text of the Acts on D and its allies.

In the last resort a text must be judged by its merits; and to do this would entail a detailed examination of two or three hundred variants. But on many of these the judgement of a critic might easily be swayed by a misapplication of some accepted critical principle or by unconscious prejudice, unless certain general considerations are borne in mind.

(1) Two generations of scholars have been 'brought up' on a text of the New Testament which is either that of Westcott and Hort or practically identical. Naturally, therefore, we approach that text with something of the same kind of unconscious presumption of its authenticity with which our grandfathers approached the text which Hort discredited. But once we recognize the likelihood that we have such a prejudice we are on our guard against it.

(2) In the Gospels, it has become evident that in many more cases than Westcott and Hort suspected the more primitive reading is that of D (or its ally the Old Latin); nevertheless, most scholars still believe in the general superiority of the text of B. It is natural to approach the Acts with a presumption that the same thing will hold good here also. This is a fallacy. The Acts were rarely included in the same codex as the Gospels, so that their early textual history may be quite different. Thus the text of the Gospels in codex A (which contains the whole Greek Bible) is in the main Lucianic, while that of Acts is of the same type as B.

(3) For more than a century the maxim *brevior lectio potior* has been treated as an axiom, so much so that textual critics have been schooled in the belief that their first duty is to suspect interpolation. The Bezan text of Acts, being nearly ten per cent. longer than that of B, is therefore by most scholars condemned unheard. But so far as manuscripts of the Greek and Latin classics are concerned, Prof. Clark[1] has shewn that the axiom may almost be reversed. And anybody who employs a typist knows that of all errors omission is the most common. In the particular case of the Gospels, as Prof. Burkitt once pointed out, allowance must be made for a phenomenon without parallel in classical texts: sayings of Christ or short stories of His doings current in oral tradition might easily be written in the margin, and by a subsequent copyist be embodied in the text. This is probably the explanation of

[1] *The Descent of MSS.*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909.

some of the 'Western' additions in the Gospels; but *not of those in the Acts*, which are rarely of a kind which could have circulated as independent traditions.

(4) A scholar who would frame a text on B starts with two great advantages: first B is not only the oldest Greek MS, it is also one of the most carefully written. Secondly, in the Acts this type of text is supported by the formidable combination of four manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries, B, ℵ, A, C, so that he is never at the mercy of the slips or idiosyncrasies of any individual scribe. On the other hand D was written by a careless and ignorant scribe, and is full of egregious blunders; and for four-fifths of the Acts what he wrote cannot be controlled by the evidence of any Greek MS. Thus an editor who believes the 'Western' text is the more primitive must often be uncertain that our surviving authorities preserve that text in a pure form. It follows that, even if Prof. Clark is right in his main contention that B is descended from an early recension, made by deliberately abbreviating the original text, it would still be probable that it preserves a number of authentic readings which have disappeared from D by the ordinary processes of textual corruption.

In both Gospels and Acts, Lucian—or whoever produced the recension which lies behind what is variously named the 'Syrian', 'Antiochian', or 'Byzantine' text—based his revision mainly on manuscripts of the B type; but he admitted a much larger proportion of 'Western' readings into his revised text in the Gospels than in Acts, so that for the 'Western' readings he happened to select in the Gospels there is abundant Greek manuscript authority. Again, for the Gospels we have several early manuscripts of the Old Latin version, which represent a text closely akin to D; for the Acts the Old Latin evidence is scanty. For both these reasons the minor detail of the 'Western' text is far more difficult to restore with certainty in the Acts than in the Gospels. Fortunately, however, there is rather better evidence for the major 'additions'—which are the really striking feature of the 'Western' text. In the year A.D. 616 Thomas of Harkel entered in the margin of his Syriac edition readings from an old Greek MS in the monastery of the Enaton near Alexandria—and these *marginalia* include most of the 'additions' found in D. Similar *marginalia* must have been made in some Greek MS and by a subsequent copyist introduced into the text; for most of the longer Bezan additions occur in one or both of the minuscules 383 and 614—which, apart from these readings, exhibit the ordinary Byzantine text.

Prof. Clark in his text prints in bold-face type the extra matter found in D or its allies. This brings vividly to the eye of the reader the fact that the differences between this text and the 'Neutral' (B ℵ A C) are

of a kind that cannot satisfactorily be explained by the ordinary processes of textual corruption. The late J. H. Ropes (who in 1926 contributed the substantial volume on the text to Lake and Foakes-Jackson's *Beginnings of Christianity*) while maintaining the general superiority of the B type of text, felt compelled to assert 'either the "Western" text represents substantially the original, from which the text of B ℵ A C 81 as a definite recension was derived, or *vice versa* the "Western" is a rewriting of the original Old Uncial [Ropes so names the "Neutral" text], or else they are both from the original author, different stages of his own work'. The third alternative was worked out by F. Blass, who like Prof. Clark was famous as a classical scholar long before he became fascinated by the unique character of the textual problem in the Acts. This theory, for adequate reasons, Ropes and Clark alike reject. Either, then, the 'Western' or the other text goes back to the work of some one who *deliberately edited* the text before him.

Once this is realized, the ordinary canons of textual criticism become largely irrelevant. They have been devised to counter the accidental blunders of scribes, not intentional alterations by a deliberate 'improver' of the text. We ask, then, is there anywhere an analogous case of editing, the study of which may throw light on the methods of such an 'improver'? Here I venture to fortify Prof. Clark's results by calling attention to an analogy which he does not himself adduce. Happening to be a student of the Synoptic Problem, I am 'hit in the eye' by the fact that (assuming Prof. Clark's text to be what St Luke wrote) the words and sentences in bold-face type (which all the great manuscripts omit) are more often than not of the same character as the words and sentences in Mark which Matthew or Luke deem superfluous when they incorporate passages from that Gospel. Matthew and Luke add to Mark much material (mainly discourse and parable) derived from other sources, but when they reproduce Mark they consistently abbreviate. This is done partly by leaving out details which, while they add vividness to the picture, do not affect the main point of the story, partly by omitting words or clauses which can be dispensed with without substantial loss. Assuming the longer text to be original, the 'improver' of the text of Acts proceeds in the choice of sentences, phrases, or words to be omitted, in exactly the same way, only a little less drastically. I give some illustrations.

Acts x 24 f. 'And Cornelius was expecting them, and having called together his kinsmen and his near friends he was waiting for them. *And as Peter was drawing near to Caesarea one of the servants ran forward and announced that he was come. And* Cornelius *sprang up and* met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. (For the words in italics B reads 'When Peter came in'.)

Now Cornelius did not know what day, much less at what time, Peter would arrive, nor indeed whether he would come at all; it was not possible for a distinguished guest in those days to send a wire, 'Expect me Tuesday 4.45', and thus enable his host to assemble a large party to give him an appropriate welcome. The facts *must* have actually taken place as described in the longer text; one of the servants must have stayed to shew Peter the way, the other must have run ahead to forewarn Cornelius. But a second-century reviser, interested mainly in edification, might well have thought these details unnecessary and the mention of them a little undignified; they are not at all the sort of thing that an ecclesiastical reviser would have considered an improvement.

Acts xvi 30. After the earthquake the jailor at Philippi takes Paul and Silas to his own house. The 'Western' text adds, 'having made fast the rest (of the prisoners)'. Of course, that is what the jailor did; but the reviser was not interested in the other prisoners. This, again, is exactly the kind of detail which Matthew or Luke excise from Mark.

Acts xix 28. The silversmiths at Ephesus being told by Demetrius that Paul's preaching will ruin the trade in images are 'filled with rage and shout saying "Great is Diana of the Ephesians", and so raise the whole city'. After 'full of rage' the Western text adds, 'running to the square'. Again the detail is original; the meeting of craftsmen would be more or less private; to rouse the city they would first rush to the great square. But a late reviser would not think of that, or care about it if he did.

In some cases accidental omission may explain the shorter text:

Acts xxiv 6–8. 'Who, moreover, assayed to profane the temple: on whom also we laid hold: *and would have judged him according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come before thee:* from whom thou wilt be able, by examining him thyself, to take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.'

According to the 'Western' reading (which in this particular case has got into the late cursives on which the Textus Receptus was based) the Counsel for the prosecution informs the Court that they can verify the truth of his statements by the evidence of the Roman officer who arrested St Paul; according to the 'Neutral' (and earlier Byzantine) MSS, he proposes to substantiate his accusations by the word of the prisoner himself—although he knew that Paul, being a Roman citizen, could not be examined under torture. In this case the omission is perhaps more likely to have been an accidental error in the archetype of the 'Neutral' MSS than a deliberate excision.

Accidental omission in an ancestor of the 'Neutral' text is the probable explanation of the disappearance of 'and stopping at Trogylia' (xx 15)

and of 'and Myra' (xxi 1). The suggestion that the words were added by a reviser who knew that coasting boats usually called at these ports is a desperate attempt to 'save the face' of an accepted text.

A different problem is raised by Acts xix 1. In the 'Western' text this opens with, 'But though Paul intended, according to his own desire (*θέλοντος δὲ τοῦ Παύλου κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν βουλήν*), to go to Jerusalem, the Spirit bade him return to Asia.' We know from other passages in the Acts that a change of plan, due to the intervention of the Spirit, had happened before: Acts xvi 6–8. 'And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having being forbidden of the Holy Ghost to speak the word in Asia; and when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.' Intrinsically, therefore, the 'Western' addition is *in character*; on the other hand, it is hard to see why a second-century ecclesiastical reviser should think it edifying to multiply instances of the deliberate desire and intention of so godly a man as an Apostle being overruled by the Holy Ghost.

Here I will venture to make a suggestion of my own. St Paul's journey, as described in the 'Neutral' text, seems curiously pointless. His objective is said (xviii 18) to be Syria; he declines the invitation of the Ephesians to stay longer, and hurries on, apparently to Antioch; but he travels *via Caesarea* (xviii 22), which is 250 miles south of Antioch. Sir William Ramsay rightly defended another 'Western' reading (which appears also in most of the Byzantine MSS and so in the Textus Receptus) in xviii 21. This gives the reason for St Paul's haste: 'I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem.' Both the intention and the haste to arrive in time for the feast are characteristic of St Paul (cf. xx 16); such attendance at a feast was an expression of loyalty on his part (where practicable) to Jewish traditions that might ease the strain caused by his attitude to the Law which nearly split the primitive church. Ramsay argues that, *with* this addition, the words in the following verse, 'He landed at Caesarea and went up and saluted the church', imply that the church saluted was Jerusalem. Ramsay's suggestion gives a rational explanation of St Paul's movements; but unfortunately the word *ἀναβάς* standing alone cannot be made to mean 'going up to Jerusalem'. But all the difficulties would be cleared up by the insertion in this context of the 'Western' addition which now stands in xix 1, 'But though Paul intended, according to his own desire, to go to Jerusalem, the Spirit bade him return to Asia.'

In ancient manuscripts lines accidentally omitted were (if the omission was noticed) added on the top or bottom margin; a glance at the facsimile of ℵ shews dozens of examples of this. I suggest that the 'Neutral' text is descended from a copy in which the omission of

the above lines had not been noticed; the 'Western' is descended from a manuscript in which it had been added on the margin, but the next copyist reinserted the words at the wrong place. I should add that transposition due to this cause is a frequent phenomenon in manuscripts.

Professor Clark has an important discussion of transpositions in the text of Acts (pp. lii–lv). One of these, if he is right, is of considerable historical interest. He points out (p. liv) that the famous conflict between St Luke and Josephus as to the relative order of the rebellions of Theudas and Judas of Galilee could be explained in this way, as due to the accidental transposition of lines in the archetype of all our manuscripts. Such a thing is possible; for it looks as if the manuscript used by Cassiodorus was free from another transposition found in all existing MSS. It would seem that Cassiodorus reads the words in xx 12 'he brought (ἤγαγε as in D, not ἤγαγον) the lad alive, and were not a little comforted' immediately *after* 'for his life is in him' in xx 10; and quite obviously this is their proper place.

Readings which can be plausibly explained as accidental omissions in the archetype of the 'Neutral' text demolish the unduly high claims that have been made for that text; they do not *in themselves* prove that the 'Western' text is *in general* primitive. It must be shewn that this holds of some at any rate of the minor variants. Here Prof. Clark scores at least one bull's-eye. In Acts xix 29 Gaius and Aristarchus are called Macedonians; but in xx 4 Gaius has become a native of Derbe in Asia Minor. Clark shews that the 'Western' reading for Δερβαῖος is Δοβήριος; and that twenty-six miles from Philippi there was a town Doberus which was mentioned by Thucydides and (nearly 1,000 years later) sent a bishop to the Council of Chalcedon.

I adduce three other minor variants where the 'Western' text is clearly original: xviii 14, Gallio in the 'Neutral' text addresses the Jews, ὦ Ἰουδαῖοι; in the 'Western', ὦ ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι; xix 25, Demetrius addresses the silversmiths, in the 'Neutral' text as ἄνδρες, in the 'Western' as ἄνδρες συντεχνῖται. 'Fellow craftsmen' is what a large employer would say in a speech intended to get the co-operation of smaller men and employees. Moreover, the customary Greek address (ἄνδρες before the title of those addressed) is the regular Lucan usage. Elsewhere in Acts ἄνδρες so occurs with Γαλιλαῖοι, Ἰουδαῖοι, Ἀθηναῖοι, Ἐφέσιοι, Ἰσραηλεῖται (five times), with ἀδελφοί (eleven times). Lucan usage is therefore decisive in favour of the 'Western' reading both in xviii 14 and xix 25.

Not less attractive is the 'Western' reading in xvii 27, which for ζητεῖν τὸν θεὸν has μάλιστα ζητεῖν τὸ θεῖον [Clark reads ὅ θεῖόν ἐστιν; but the ἐστὶν in D is surely due to the *quod divinum est* on the Latin side]. 'The God who created . . . *especially* to seek for *the divine*, if haply they

might feel after it' [αὐτὸ ἢ for αὐτὸν καὶ, D A Iren.]. Apart from the fact that τὸν θεὸν is grammatically awkward when ὁ θεός is the subject of the sentence, τὸ θεῖον is more appropriate to the delicate groping implied in the subsequent εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν. Again, the addition of μάλιστα, which makes the finding of God the main end of creation, is rhetorically preferable.

Many other minor variants are similarly attractive—once they are studied without the antecedent prejudice that a 'Western' reading is probably wrong. Nevertheless there are 'Western' variants of this kind which are clearly inferior. In St Paul's farewell speech at Ephesus, for example, the vivid reading αἱ χεῖρες αὗται (implying an accompanying gesture) is certainly original; αἱ χεῖρές μου of D Pesh. Sah. is tame by comparison. But αὗται is supported here, not only by the other Greek MSS, but by Augustine, Ambrosiaster, and the *speculum*, normally followers of the 'Western' text (xx 34).

This example is important as illustrating the danger, against which a *caveat* has been entered earlier in this article, of assuming that our scanty authorities for the 'Western' text always give it in a pure form. Even if we hold that the 'Neutral' text is the work of a second-century reviser, it is still probable that the manuscripts he used had in many places escaped corruptions which occur in D and some of its supporters. Prof. Clark admits this in principle, and occasionally (especially in passages where D is defective) admits a non-Western reading into his text. I should myself incline to press for its application on a more extended scale. I detect, for instance, a tendency towards reverential amplification of the titles applied to Jesus, such as the addition of Κύριος ii 38, vii 55; of Χριστὸς i 22, iii 13; of both titles xiii 32. These alterations may be due to an emendator; but his emendations are of a relatively gentle character, comparable to those which explain the difference between the Neutral and, what Hort called, the 'Alexandrian' texts, or between the earlier texts and the Lucianic revision.

Again, some of the longer additions accepted by Prof. Clark suggest to me the hand of an interpolator. A reviser would not intentionally cut out the Golden Rule (in its negative form) in Acts xv 29; and, though accidental omission of lines is always a possibility, the sentiment is one which an interpolator might naturally think specially appropriate in this place. So too I suspect the 'Western' addition (xxviii 31), 'that this is Jesus the son of God, through whom the whole world will be judged'. To me this looks like an attempt to round off the (from the standpoint of religious edification) unsatisfactory ending of the book—comparable to the 'shorter ending' of Mark found in L Ψ *k* &c.

I do *not*, however, regard as interpolations the additional references to the Holy Spirit, on account of which Dr Rendel Harris (more than

thirty years ago) assigned the 'Western' text to a 'Montanist revision'. Emphasis on the operation of the Spirit is a characteristically Lucan interest—both in the Gospel[1] and in Acts. It is far more likely that the abbreviator who formed the 'Neutral' text was slightly anti-Montanist, and toned down Luke's reiterated allusions to a conception of the Divine influence which was being used, in an exaggerated form, to discredit ecclesiastical authority.

J. H. Ropes, the most recent defender of the 'Neutral' text, argues for the secondary character of the 'Western' text on the ground that it occasionally removes 'the obscurity' of the other text and makes it 'smoother, and more emphatic'. Now if we had no other writing by Luke, this contention would be plausible. But we have the Gospel, and we have one of his sources in Mark. We know, therefore, that Luke is a careful stylist, that he *removes obscurities* in his source, that he makes its language smooth, and (though he abbreviates by cutting out unnecessary repetition and at times unimportant detail) he is concerned to make emphatic (if necessary by amplificatory words) points which he thinks of interest. On the other hand, all scholars admit that the style of Acts in the 'Neutral' text is rougher than the Gospel; so much so that more than one has suggested that it lacked final revision by the author. But if the 'Neutral' text is the result, partly of accidental omission and the botching this entails, and partly of clumsy abbreviation, the roughness of style is otherwise accounted for.

Ropes states (*The Beginnings of Christianity*, iii, ccxxxiv) that 'the date of the origin of the "Western" text must be set as early as the first half of the second century'; 'his text is nearly one-tenth longer' than the 'Neutral', and 'he uses a vocabulary notably the same as the original author'. Ropes overlooks the significance of his last admission. Sir John Hawkins shewed that there are marked linguistic differences between the three Synoptists although they are nearly contemporary with one another. Dr P. N. Harrison has more recently demonstrated the even greater linguistic gulf between the Pastorals and the Ten Epistles of St Paul. Yet we are asked to believe that a second-century reviser, not in one or two long passages (when he might have studiously copied a model), but in a number of passages scattered over the whole book, has managed to adopt the vocabulary of the original author! He has also (as I have shewn) adopted the characteristic theological interest of the original author. He has managed to introduce bits of what looks like genuine local colour all along the road from Jerusalem to Rome—the

[1] I have argued elsewhere (*The Four Gospels*, p. 276 f) for the originality of the reading (which is as early as Marcion) of Lk. xi 2 in 700, &c., viz. the substitution for ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου of ἐλθέτω τὸ πνεῦμά σου τὸ ἅγιον ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ καθαρισάτω ἡμᾶς.

seven steps of the prison (xii 10) at Jerusalem; the closing hours of the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus, the time when it would not be required by its owner ('the fifth to the tenth hour', xix 9); unimportant ports of call on the coast of Asia Minor (xx 15, xxi 1); a slight pause at Apollonia (implied in κἀκεῖθεν, xvii 1) on the journey from Philippi to Thessalonica; the title of the officer (xxviii 16) who received the prisoners at Rome. He was a reviser of superhuman ingenuity!

In the main, I contend, Prof. Clark has proved his case—even though, in the actual formation of his text, he may have occasionally fallen to a temptation—of which Westcott and Hort themselves were constantly the victims—of over-estimating the weight to be attached to what he accepts as *the best MS.*

His book concludes with a series of elaborate excursuses on the main authorities for the 'Western' text, of unique and permanent value to all students of the text, whether or no they accept the conclusions which he draws.

To take leave of such a book on a note of dissent may seem ungracious. Dissent, however, seems called for by the conclusion advanced in an appendix, that the Third Gospel and Acts are by different authors—a conclusion argued on the ground of slight differences in vocabulary and stylistic usage. For in the Gospel itself there are three distinct types of style and diction (appropriate in each case to the varying subject-matter) in the Preface, the Infancy Stories, and the rest of the Gospel. In the Acts there is a further change in the character of the subject-matter; in the main it records the adventures of a Roman citizen in the Gentile world; the author may well have thought yet another slight difference in stylistic treatment appropriate. Prof. Clark ignores the fact that the case for the unity of authorship of the Gospel and Acts depends largely on considerations other than linguistic—the identity in theological *tendenz*, aim, and 'atmosphere', not to mention the interest shewn in certain types of persons such as women, Samaritans, the Herods, &c. Nor is it an accident that the last speech in the Acts is 'Be it known therefore unto you that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear'; while the public ministry of Christ opens with the (purposely displaced) incident of the rejection at Nazareth, with its moral 'No prophet is acceptable in his own country'.

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