

THE TEXT OF THE SINAI PALIMPSEST.

As several communications about the text of the Syriac Gospels of Mount Sinai have already appeared in this magazine, I think it is fitting that I should make through it what is perhaps the most important of them all.

Professor Burkitt published in 1904 an edition of the Cureton manuscript, entitled *The Evangelion da Mepharreshe*, and attached to it a collation of the Sinai text, which included nearly the whole of the Gospel of St. Mark. While the number of small mistakes inevitable in the case of a palimpsest and occurring in the work of the original transcribers, of whom he himself was one, were corrected with the help of my photographs, and of the supplementary transcription which I made in 1895, in its unedited state, I still did not feel satisfied for several reasons.

I. I knew that some of these corrections were arbitrary, as they reversed the judgment of the original transcribers, without any proper basis for doing so ; the motive being apparently in some instances to assimilate a Sinai reading to one of Cureton. The more this process prevails, the more will scholars be inclined to assign a later date to the earlier, i.e. the Sinai text.

II. Many of the passages were called illegible which belong to that half of the MS. which Dr. Burkitt has never seen. I mean to the portions transcribed by Dr. Rendel Harris or by myself, or even to pages which Dr. Bensly and he had not time to finish. Here the proper adjective would have been "unread."

III. The folio numbers, so important in the eyes of Pro-

fessor Bensly and Dr. Harris, were entirely omitted even from the text of St. Mark, which is not extant in the Curetonian. This made the book useless for the purpose of any scholar who might wish to verify a disputed passage. How important these folio numbers are, will be seen when my readers recollect that the leaves of the fourth century Gospel MS. were shuffled together like a pack of playing cards before John the Stylite, in the seventh or eighth century, wrote upon them his "Stories of Holy Women." Omit the numerals, and you cannot find your place in the palimpsest.

These defects in Dr. Burkitt's book induced me to prepare and publish a new edition which appeared in 1910, under the name of *The Old Syriac Gospels*, with *Evangelion da Mepharreshe* as its sub-title. In Appendix I. I set forth the points of difference between Dr. Burkitt and myself, amounting to something like 300 in number.

More than one reviewer has pointed out that on the accuracy of that Appendix the permanent value of my book depends; and only this month a writer (in the *Tablet*) expressed a wish that some expert scholar might go to Sinai and decide on which points Dr. Burkitt or I might be right. The ink of that review was hardly dry when the wish expressed in it was fulfilled.

I imagine that it was the publication of my book which induced Dr. Arthur Hjelt, Professor of Hebrew in the University of Helsingfors, to travel to Sinai about the end of last February, and to make a careful examination of the palimpsest text with the help of my Appendix I. I have just received his report of the result, and this it is which I wish to communicate to the readers of the EXPOSITOR.

Dr. Hjelt is the author of an important work entitled *Die altsyrische Evangelienübersetzung und Tatians Diatesaron*. It is to a great extent a dissertation on the text

of the Sinai Palimpsest, written at the time he got his doctor's diploma at Helsingfors. He was therefore already familiar with the subject, and is, so far as I know, the first expert scholar who has examined the MS., outside the circle of the original transcribers.

Unfortunately, he was not allowed to use the reagent, a well-known German scholar, resident in Cairo, having strongly advised the monks not to allow it, lest some injury might be done to the manuscript. And I quite agree that there might be some danger of this result in the careless or inexperienced hands of one who might lay on the stuff too thickly, or close the page while still wet without the use of blotting paper.

More than half of the disputed words and specially those passages which have been called illegible are as yet unverified. But on 170 (out of 300) Dr. Hjelt has given us his opinion. He has placed the letter (c), i.e., "correct," against all words which he has actually seen and has underlined them; and the letter (p) against those which he could not quite decipher, but believes to be possible.

He gives 11 c.s and 7 p.s to Dr. Burkitt;
133 c.s and 21 p.s to me.

The result could hardly have been different. Dr. Burkitt is accurate and painstaking to a degree when he has the material before him. But he has tried the impossible task of making a perfectly correct text without the immediate aid of the manuscript. The three Cambridge scholars who visited the Monastery in 1893 for the purpose of transcribing its text, divided the work into three not quite equal portions, each having the right to use the MS. during three hours of the short winter days. If any one poached on the portion assigned to another, he could only do it surreptitiously, unless he was requested to revise it; and he would have been taking up time which proved far too

short for his own work. Thus it has come to pass that Dr. Burkitt has never seen the portion, a third of the whole, which was transcribed by Dr. Harris; and as he has visited the Convent only once, he has never had the remotest chance of seeing the most faded portion of all, very little of which is visible in my photographs, and which I deciphered in 1895 and later, amounting to nearly a sixth of the text.

I recollect once conversing with the late Dr. Friederich Blass, who was so wonderful as an editor of difficult texts, about some controversy which was then going on in the English press. It may have been about the lately discovered poems of Bacchylides. "I am amazed at your English scholars," he said: "they argue and argue with each other about some obscure passage, and they propose very ingenious emendations. But the best of all witnesses they do not always consult." "Who is that?" I asked. A twinkle came into the gentle, dreamy eyes: "The manuscript," he replied.

I have no means of verifying this opinion of Dr. Blass in regard to classical texts. But it has happened to the Sinai Palimpsest. The words about which we have disputed are, after all, a small proportion compared to the whole. Two of them, however, Matthew xx. 15, and John i. 41, contain readings which are of value, and every syllable ought to be weighed when it occurs in one of the earliest copies of the Holy Gospel.

For the benefit of those who possess my edition, I subjoin a list of the 133 verses containing doubtful words which Dr. Hjelt has ruled in my favour.

Matt i. 2 †; ii. 2; 16 †; iii. 3; v. 19; viii. 16; viii. 24 and 29 are partly in my favour, and partly in Dr. Burkitt's; xv. 2; xvi. 9; xviii. 15 †; 19 †; xix. 11 †;

† Signifies that the reading was in the Syndics' edition, so that it is witnessed for by four people.

xxi. 38 †; xxiv. 2; xxv. 11; xxvi. 24 † as in text; 29; xxvii. 20 †; 37; 43;

Mark iv. 1 †; v. 18; vi. 55 †; viii. 2; 12; xi. 22; xiii. 25; 27; 28; xiv. 19; 22; 24; xvi. 4 †; 8² †;

Luke i. 70; 79; 80; ii. 8; 9; 12; 15 †; iv. 35; 35; 36 †; 40 †; v. 4; 19 †; 26² †; vi. 33; viii. 19² †; ix. 52 †; x. 4; xii. 54; xiii. 32; xiv. 1; xv. 6; xvi. 23; xvii. 15; xix. 4; xx. 33; xxi. 15; 31; xxii. 45;

John i. 41; 42; iii. 14 †; 21; 21; 21 †; iv. 21; 35; vi. 11, five words; vi. 19 the much doubted $\epsilon\iota\alpha\mu\lambda\zeta$; 37; vii. 11 †; 19 †; 49; 51; viii. 13; 33; ix. 2; 2; x. 38; xi. 2; 18; 21; 25 conjectured by Dr. Burkitt, but read by me; xii. 29; 37; xiii. 32; xviii. 10; 15; xx. 1.

Also in the Supplement to Appendix I, pp. 294–299:

Matt. ii. 9 †; iii. 14 †; v. 42 †; viii. 4 †; xvii. 20 †; xxiii. 17 †; xxiv. 22; 41; Mark i. 29; vi. 49; viii. 2;

Luke i. 15 †; ii. 9; vii. 38 †; 44 †; viii. 49 †; x. 3 †; xi. 8² †; 38; xii. 3 †; 16 †; 31; 50 †; xiii. 14 †; 32; xviii. 14 †; xix. 12 †; xx. 33; xxi. 12; xxiii. 18; 49;

John vi. 52; vii. 25; 45 †; ix. 11.

Of the words which Dr. Hjelt thinks possible, he has underlined 21 in my favour.

Mark viii. 25; Luke v. 1; 18 †; 22²; viii. 19¹ †; xix. 1; 6; 7 †; xxiii. 49;

John vi. 25; ix. 9; x. 29; xiii. 23; xv. 6; 24; xviii. 2.

And in the Supplement, pp. 294–299; Matt. xxi. 24 †;

Mark xiv. 4; xvi. 7 †. Here Dr. Hjelt, not having the reagent, did not see the *seyyame* points.

Luke xxii. 6; xxiii. 35 †;

In the following passages Dr. Hjelt underlines 7 of Dr. Burkitt's readings as correct.

† Signifies that it was in the transcription which I made in 1895, but was not approved of. It has therefore only three witnesses, for it was not included in *Some Pages*.

Matt. xxii. 19. Luke xix. 5 a dot ; *John xiii. 22 ;
 In the Supplement, John iii. 21 ; vii. 32 ; x. 9 ; xiii. 38.
 And 11 as possible :

Matt. viii. 24 partly ; 29 partly ; cf. *supra*.

Mark xi. 20 ; xiv. 9 ; *xvi. *8¹ ;

Luke v. 22¹ ; *ix. 38 ; xix. *28 ;

In the Supplement, *Mark xvi. 5 ; Luke xii. 42 ; *xvi. 16.

I do not, however, accept all these 18 corrections to my own work. Those which I have marked with an asterisk I at first read as Dr. Burkitt and Dr. Hjelt have done. But a slight touch with the reagent revealed to me an additional final letter, or syllable, a *·* an *|* a *o* or an *↵* which may put the word in the plural, but have now faded away.

I ought to explain that on every page of the manuscript there is a deep brown stain in the form of a wavy line which makes me believe that at one period of its existence the book lay partly in water. A similar stain is found at the junction of some of the leaves. These stains do not interfere much with the legibility of the upper script, but to my eyes, they nearly obliterate the under one. Yet Dr. Burkitt professes to have read through the reproduction of these stains in the photographs, where he has mis-corrected the work of the first transcribers. In nine or ten other instances, the correct word, as read by me and corroborated by Dr. Hjelt, can be seen distinctly in the photographs. These instances are : Matt. ii. 9, 16 ; xxiii. 17 ; Mark xvi. 4 ; and perhaps xvi. 7 ; also Luke vii. 44 ; viii. 49 ; xviii. 14 ; xii. 50 ; John vii. 45.

A complete set of the photographs in book form will be found in the University Library, Cambridge, Westminster College, Cambridge, John Rylands Library, Manchester, University Library, Halle ; and in the form of lantern slides at Heidelberg and St. Andrews. In point of legibility the pages vary greatly ; not only has the Gospel

writing almost faded from one side of a leaf, while it is clear on the other, but the upper half of many pages are clear, and the writing in the lower half almost invisible. In no instance do my photographs show anything that cannot be seen in the manuscript.

In John xiii. 22 I do not yet accept ܐܘܢ though it has been read by Rendel Harris, Burkitt, and Hjelt. There was a heavy smudge over what was supposed to be the first letter; and the vellum has been injured. In 1906 I thought I perceived that the ܐ is larger than the other two letters; and this roused my suspicion that it may belong to the upper script. No word occurs on f. 11a to which I could assign it; but as the vellum at that spot has become very thin through some ill-treatment, I would submit that it may be the ܐ of ܐܘܢ in the story of St. Thekla shining through from f. 11b. No instance of a word ܐܘܢ is found elsewhere in any Syriac author, and although it might be a combination of ܐܘܢ and ܐܘܢ, I do not think this at all probable.

And I cannot give up my new reading of Matthew xx. 15 *in domo mea*. Dr. Burkitt reads ܘܢܘܢܘܢܘܢ and Dr. Hjelt suggests that it may be ܘܢܘܢܘܢܘܢ. I thought also when I first saw it that it was ܘܢܘܢܘܢ "with my own." When my brush brought up ܘܢܘܢܘܢ I got a start, for I had never heard that a reading "*in domo mea*" existed in any MS., and found that it is in the Armenian Diatessaron only after my return home. No suggestion from outside helped me to see it at Sinai. If Dr. Hjelt had been allowed to use the reagent, the lower strokes of the ܘ would have reappeared and also the base of the ܘ, and he would not have taken them for ܘ and ܘ. It must be remembered, by those who have never tried to read a palimpsest, that its under script was all purposely erased nearly 1,200 years ago.

In Mark viii. 3 Dr. Hjelt saw my ܘܢܘܢܘܢ. He might,

therefore, have given me the credit of the word preceding it; as there cannot be room for $\text{ܠܐ} | \text{ܗܝ}$ in that line.

I am sorry that Dr. Hjelt, owing to his not using the reagent did not see ܘܫܘܥܐ "Saviour," in Luke xxiii. 39. But he has found some other words of my reading which have been doubted: ܘܘܫܘܥܐ "they turned pale," in John vi. 19; two miles, $\text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ}$ in John xi. 18; which gives the right distance of Bethany from Jerusalem; and a reading which I communicated to Dr. Burkitt before the publication of his book, and which he declined to believe me about, in Matthew xxvii. 43, $\text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ}$ "Lo! he trusted in God," instead of $\text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ} | \text{ܘܘܫܘܥܐ}$ "If he trusted in God." My reading is more idiomatic Syriac than the other is.

The reading may easily be illustrated in English. If in a very faded script you were to read "Ha! he trusted in God," and you did not see the "ha!" very clearly, seeing, in fact, only the "h," you might think that the word was "he." The pronoun which is the nominative to a Semitic verb is seldom expressed; so Dr. Burkitt had to account for its presence. He solved the difficulty by prefixing an imaginary "If" to it, p. 544. The gift of being able to emend an ancient but illegible text is one to be envied; for its possession implies a great amount of both learning and ingenuity. But a single look at the manuscript has far more practical value in the end, for we want to read what was written in the second century, not in the twentieth. We cannot find this variant in any other MS., and I would submit that in a phrase which records the fact of our Lord's trust in His Father, an "If" is singularly out of place, even in the mouths of Jewish scoffers. Dr. Burkitt has not ventured to introduce it into his main text, but he suggests it as the correct reading in Appendix III. p. 544.

Of those eleven corrections to my work which I am prepared to allow, five belong to the short Supplement; they were therefore adopted when I was at home, and thus I had not the MS. to refer to. I have therefore fallen just a little way into the trap which Dr. Blass once warned me against. To work on a manuscript, and specially on a palimpsest, in the absence of the chief witness for your accuracy, and expect to get anything like a faultless text, is to attempt the impossible.

In 39 instances, with the very best intentions, Dr. Burkitt has corrected words which have now four witnesses in their favour—they having been in the Syndics' edition of 1894. These witnesses are, the original transcriber, myself, my sister, Mrs. Gibson (to whom in 1902 and 1906 I always showed disputed words), and Dr. Hjelt. Of these 24 will be found in Dr. Harris' portion of the Syndics' edition, eight in Dr. Burkitt's own published transcription, three in Dr. Bensly's, and two in Bensly's and Burkitt's conjointly. There are also eight similar instances in my *Some Pages*.

We certainly owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Hjelt for having given us a great measure of certainty in regard to a text so valuable and interesting as that of the Sinai Gospels. We only regret that his examination could not extend to those passages from which the words appear to have completely faded. But now that he has shown that a few uncommon words, which I have had the temerity to publish, are correct, though archaic, I would wish to be believed when I say that my reading ⲉⲛⲥⲁ in Luke xxiii. 39 is certainly there, and is no product of my imagination. It is quite in accordance with Semitic custom to use a verb, and a noun from the same root.

Nor must we forget that Dr. Burkitt has spent a great amount of time and labour on his revision of the work of former transcribers. In many of the "corrigenda" in

could not find it. I am glad that Dr. Hjelt has seen it. His eyes are younger than mine; but possibly also the after effect of my reagent has been in the direction of clearing it up. Dr. Burkitt, never having seen that page, has read only the first word of that sentence from my photograph, and has conjectured the rest. How far that conjecture agrees with the reality is now easily seen. True, he has put the supposed words in brackets; but possibly a future editor of this text might drop the brackets, and a travesty of the sentence, *i.e.* a Peshitta reading passing as a Sinai one, would have gone down to posterity if I had not interfered with it. Certainly in this instance both of us would have done better to have abstained from conjecturing.

My vision of brackets disappearing is no imaginary one. In the January number of the *Journal of Theological Studies* for 1911 Dr. Barnes says on p. 304 that he prefers Dr. Burkitt's [ⲉⲗⲁ] "went up," to my ⲛⲁ "went down" in Mark iv. 1 [ⲉⲗⲁ] was Dr. Burkitt's conjecture, and Dr. Barnes drops the brackets in adopting it, whereas Dr. Hjelt has confirmed my ⲛⲁ. And this is by no means the only instance that I have noticed, even in the short time that this Sinai text has been before the public. The sea of Galilee is nearly 700 feet below the sea-level. There must therefore be many places where the shore slopes downwards.

Scholars are generally agreed, I believe, in thinking that the Curetonian text is a revision of the Sinai one, and the Peshitta a further revision, made probably by Bishop Rabbula in the beginning of the fifth century; I was told this, and I saw its likelihood, several years before Dr. Burkitt stated it clearly in *Evangelion da Mepharreshe*, p. 5. It was done to bring the Old Syriac into harmony with Greek MSS. But how can we trace this properly if

the gaps in the Sinai text are occasionally patched up from the Curetonian or the Peshitta ?

When I have myself ventured on a conjecture, it is because I have seen some indication of the word I have suggested on the injured surface of the vellum, though it has not been clear enough to justify me in adopting it. My $\{ \text{p} \sim \text{m} \}$ for instance, is probably the end of $\{ \text{p} \sim \text{m} \}$.

In Matthew xxii. 19, and Luke xii. 42 my divergent words are small questions of spelling. In the first of these I have been influenced by a wish to assimilate it to the reading of the first transcriber, and in both to that of Cureton. In Mark xi. 20 Dr. Hjelt has seen a *yod* where I failed to do so. In a palimpsest text it is often very difficult to ascertain the presence of a *yod*, for no letter can be so easily obscured by the upper writing. Again, an *ain* or a *nun* will be read as a *yod*, if its upper half be similarly obscured.

In Mark xiv. 9, and Luke xix. 5 there are questions as to the presence of a dot. Dr. Harris and Dr. Hjelt detected the first one. I could not do so. I congratulate them on its presence, but the dot in Luke spoils the sense of our Lord's speech to Zaccheus.

For $\{ \text{m} \}$ as opposed to $\{ \text{m} \}$ in John x. 9, I am probably wrong; but when you have three or four strokes all the same length, though representing several letters, and the first of them are completely hidden, it is difficult to be sure of them. My photograph of this page shows four strokes before the $\{ \}$. Dr. Hjelt would, however, be helped by the difference in colour between the two scripts.

In $\{ \text{m} \}$ John xiii. 38, I find in my note-book of 1895 that I put a \circ into that word. I stupidly overlooked it in 1910. Dr. Harris probably copied it $\{ \text{m} \}$ in 1893, and edited it $\{ \text{m} \}$ at home, as I have done. He probably was, like me, influenced by a not very clear

photograph ; and this only shows the more that to expect absolute correctness, without consulting the manuscript, is not a sign of wisdom.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about the probable date of the version. Professor Burkitt places it about A.D. 200, and professes to know who was the translator, which is an achievement somewhat resembling his misreading of several words beneath the dark stains in the MS. which show almost black in my photographs. Dr. Friederich Blass and Dr. Adalbert Merx, amongst those who have left us, and amongst the living, Drs. Hjelt and Heer, all of whom have studied it closely, think that the Diatessaron came between the Sinai MS., and the Cureton MS., and that therefore the Old Syriac represents the earliest translation of the Gospels into any language ; the Cureton being the Sinai text revised.

In support of Dr. Burkitt's theory we are asked to believe :
I. That the early Christians of Palestine did not particularly care to read the story of our Lord's life in their own tongue, but were content to study the Old Testament prophecies concerning Him. Thus they were all in their graves, about 130 years after our Lord's ascension, when Tatian kindly bestowed his Syriac Harmony of the Diatessaron on their grandchildren.

II. That Syriac-speaking Christians hardly existed, for the villages of Palestine were never evangelized, or that the Christian peasants of the first two centuries spoke Greek.

If we were to accept this theory, it is difficult to explain the great joy of the seventy, or seventy and two, disciples on their return to our Lord after a not altogether unsuccessful mission (Luke x. 17). It is also difficult to explain how there were saints in Lydda (Acts ix. 32) and people who believed in Joppa (Acts ix. 42). To whom did the daughters of Philip the Evangelist prophesy ? (Acts xxi. 9). And

did the twelve apostles, with the five hundred brethren, fulfil our Lord's injunction to go into all the world and teach all nations, by beginning to preach first in Jerusalem, and passing over the whole land of Palestine, which we might imagine had been specially prepared for the reception of the Gospel, focus the most of their efforts at Antioch, near which, as my study of the poor photograph of a very poor page told me in 1900, lay the early home of the Sinai Palimpsest itself, amongst an Aramaic-speaking peasantry, if we may believe the witness of Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century? The city of Antioch may have been a centre of Greek learning, but it was not the way of the Gospel to lay hold exclusively of the great and wise: it was in fact a chief sign of its divine origin that it was preached to the poor.

Let us take for granted, provisionally, that the Sinai form of the Old Syriac is anterior to the Diatessaron and is therefore the oldest of the versions. We then understand why Mark xvi. 9-20 is absent from it, though present in the Arabic translation of the Diatessaron, and in the Cureton MS.

A writer in the January number of the *London Quarterly Review* has suggested that the reason for its omission of our Lord's beautiful prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," is that anti-Jewish feeling ran very high amongst the Christian community of Palestine at the time the translation from Greek to Syriac was made: that they, in fact, were not forgiving to their bitter persecutors.

There is, however, a still more interesting phenomenon which has to be accounted for. Why is the Sinai text, even more than the Cureton one, so full of little interesting graphic touches? You cannot put them all down to the genius of the language, else some of them would have been

preserved to us also in the Peshitta. I do not allude to the *πρωϊ* instead of *πρωτον* in John i. 41, for we suspect that *πρωϊ* was in the original Greek, and has come down to us as *mane* in b, e, and r of the Old Latin; nor the "hath Abraham seen thee?" of John viii. 57, for that is also in the Greek Codex Sinaiticus. But "they wondered that with the woman He was *standing* and talking," in John. iv. 27, is also in the Armenian version of the Diatessaron; "Lord that our eyes may be opened and that we may see Thee," in Matthew xx. 33, is preserved to us in the Curetonian MS., where the page of the Sinai one has been lost; "And seven *days* only was she (Anna) with a husband after her virginity" in Luke ii. 36; "And all the people and the publicans that heard *justified themselves to God*"; the incident of the unjust steward in Luke xvi., sitting down himself and writing off half of each of the debts, instead of telling the debtors to do so, and the many other interesting variants, whence came they? May they not be there because the mind of the translator (or translators, for Dr. Hjelt thinks there were four, one for each Gospel), was consciously influenced by the narratives of those who had been eye-witnesses of the events recorded, or of the children of those who had been eye-witnesses? I cannot see that this hypothesis is more absurd than some notable ones which have been put forth on the subject, and it is the less improbable, inasmuch as none of these variants appear either forced or artificial, but have the same delightful simplicity which is the charm of the Four Gospels, and which eighteen centuries of copying and editing have not succeeded in destroying.

The report is now in the hands of the Librarian of Westminster College, Cambridge, who will willingly show it to any one who may desire to investigate the matter further.

AGNES SMITH LEWIS.