Review of J. Rendel Harris's A Study of Codex Bezae

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The Cambridge University Press has just issued Part I. of the second volume of Texts and Studies. It is *A Study of Codex Beza*, by Professor Rendel Harris of Haverford College, Pennsylvania. What a delight the volume would have been to the late Dr. Scrivener had he lived to see it. He himself edited the most serviceable edition which we have of that singular codex, though it has generally been overlooked in the published lists of his works; and throughout his long life he was strongly attracted by the perplexing questions which surround it.

"THAT SINGULAR CODEX."

Since Dean Burgon's articles in *the Quarterly* the phrase has become classic. There are educated Englishmen who will tell you, if you inquire about Codex Bezae, that it is a singular codex; they will tell you so much with alacrity, and they are surprised to find that that is all they know about it.

Possibly they will venture the further remark that it was the late Dean Burgon called it so, but tentatively, they may be mistaken in that (and they are mistaken), but they are quite sure that it is a singular codex.

Dean Burgon was not the author of the phrase. He quoted it from the present Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol. But it is through Dean Buigon that it has become an English classic, for he quoted it so aptly and he quoted it so often that he made it stick, and classic is that which sticks.

Its original place is Bishop Ellicott's Considerations on Revision (1870), p. 40 (will Dr. Murray note the place and date?). There the Bishop describes four of the five great MSS. of the New Testament in the following terse and perfectly accurate words: —

> The simplicity and dignified conciseness of the Vatican Manuscript (B); the greater expansiveness of our own Alexandrian (A); the partially muted characteristics of the Sinaitic (א); the paraphrastic tone of the singular Codex Bezae (D), are now brought home to the student . . .

Of these famous codices, including C (Codex Ephraemi or Manuscript of Ephraem, now in the National Library, Paris), Dr. Burgon had no high opinion, though the expression of his opinion went further than the opinion itself.

In one of the *Quarterly* articles, it will be remembered, he gives it as his belief that, so far from being the best authorities for the text of the New Testament, the four א? B C D,

> "are indebted for their preservation solely to the circumstance that they were long since recognized as the depositories of readings which rendered them utterly untrustworthy ";

and, as is his wont, he challenges any one to deny the statement And again he asserts, " without a particle of hesitation," that " א B D are *three of the most corrupt copies extant*", the italics being, of course, his own, for no one has to mark the emphasis after Dean Burgon has written.

No sooner, therefore, has he quoted the Bishop of Gloucester's description of the four MSS. than he leaps forward into the following never-to-be-forgotten illustration of their corruption.

> "Could ingenuity," he asks, "have devised severer satire than such a description of four professing *transcripts* of a book, and that book, the everlasting Gospel itself? — transcripts, be it observed in passing, on which it is just now the fashion to rely implicitly for the very orthography of proper names, — the spelling of common words, — the minutiae of grammar. What (we ask) would be thought of four such *'copies'* of Thucydides or of Shakespeare? Imagine it gravely proposed, by the aid of four such conflicting documents, to readjust the text of the Funeral Oration of Pericles, or to re-edit Hamlet. Why, some of the poet's most familiar lines would become scarcely recognizable: *e.g.,*
>
> A — 'Toby or not Toby; that is the question.'
> B — *Tob or not, is the question:'
> א — *To be a tub, or not to be a tub ; the question is that.'
> C — "The question is, to beat or not to beat Toby?'
> D (*the singular codex') — *The only question is this ; to beat that Toby, or to be a tub?'"

It is a statement of the case not without exaggeration, even exaggeration which "o'erleaps it-

self and falls on the other side." But if in any instance there is an approach to accuracy in the illustration, it is in respect of the last, that singular Codex D.

Professor Rendel Harris has made a most painstaking examination of the manuscript, which belongs to the University Library at Cambridge, where "the open volume is conspicuously exhibited to visitors in the New Building." He has made the examination with the patience of a German, he has marshaled his results by the clear and open vision of an Englishman and, most difficult of all in such a subject, he has set them forth with all a Frenchman's grace, so that his book is as easy for the beginner in textual criticism as it is important for the scholar of the same; and it must be confessed that the impression which it leaves as to the reliability of this codex is not very far away from the estimate so vigorously expressed by Dr. Burgon.

But let it not be imagined for a moment that its value in the textual criticism of the Gospels and Acts (the only portions it covers) depends upon the reliableness of its text. It may seem a paradox to say that where its text is least reliable its textual value is greatest, but it is a paradox which a study of Professor Harris's volume will prove to be true. That certainly is not, nor ever has been, the popular belief among textual critics, with whom the method is simple and summary, namely, to accept its readings when they agree with others of the leading codices, and to set them aside when they do not. But the importance of this new volume of the Cambridge *Texts and Studies* lies in this, that it runs right against the ruling ideas about the Cambridge codex, even the ideas which have had Cambridge itself for their stronghold, and the great names of Westcott and Hort for their champions.

THE UNUSUAL READINGS OF CODEX D

The singularities of Codex Bezae — perhaps it ought to be explained that it gets its name from the fact that it once belonged to Beza, by whom it was presented to the University of Cambridge in the year 1581 — its singularities are many; but the most striking thing is the number of additions it makes to the commonly received text.

The word " additions" is used advisedly, for to speak of them as " interpolations," which even Scrivener does, is to brand them at once, and brand them all, with spuriousness — and that is by no means a settled question yet.

The longest of these additions is found after Matthew xx. 28. But perhaps the most interesting is the often-quoted sentence inserted after Luke vi. 4:

— '* On the same day he beheld a certain man working on the Sabbath, and said unto him, Man,

> blessed art thou if thou knowest what thou doest; but if thou knowest not, thou art cursed, and a transgressor of the law."

There is also a touching appendix of scarcely less interest to Acts viiL 24, where, after the words in the received text, "Then answered Simon, and said. Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me," our codex adds, "and he wept much and ceased not," words which every one, says Dr. Scrivener, must wish to be genuine.

One such addition (which is also an interpolation without any more doubt) is found at Luke xxiii. 53. It is of much less interest in itself, but from its bearing on the singularities of this codex, and as a clue to the explanation of these singularities, it is of the very highest importance. The verse stands thus (let us place the addition made by Codex Bezae within brackets):

> "And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain [and having laid Him, he laid against the tomb a stone which twenty hardly moved]."

How is this curious addition to be accounted for? With consummate skill Professor Rendel Harris has discovered the explanation, and marvelous as the story is, you cannot resist the evidence of its absolute truth.

THE 'HOMERIZATION' OF THE NT

In the first place, let it be remembered that our codex is a bilingual. It is written both in Greek and in Latin, the Greek occupying one page and the Latin standing line for line on the page opposite, so that when you open the volume you have the Greek on the left page and the Latin on the right. Thus, if one of our columns will be allowed to represent both pages of the manuscript, the verse in question will be found as follows: —

ενετυλιξεν το σωμα του ιην εν σινδονι	et deponens
και εθηκεν αυτον εν μνημειω	involvit corpus ihu in sindone
λιλατιμημεινω συ ουκ ην αυπω	et posuit earn in monnmento sculpto ubi adhuc
ουδδεις κειμενος και θεντος αυτου	nemo positus et posito eo imposuit
επιθηκι	
τω μνημειω λειθον ον μογις εικοσι	in monuxnento Upidem quern vix viginti
εκυλιον	movebant

"Now (to quote Professor Harris), concerning this added sentence (και θεντος ... εκυλιον) Scrivener remarks acutely that it is 'conceived somewhat in the Homeric spirit.' Let us examine, then, whether either in the Greek or Latin the added words show traces of having once been in metre. Fixing our attention on the added words in the Latin, we see that the words *posito co* and *in monumento* are a repetition from the preceding words *posuit cum in monumento*. And if we erase them, we have left what is certainly meant for a hexameter verse, —

'Imposuit lapidem quem vix viginti movebant.'

It is clear, then, that the scribe of Codex Bezae, or, if we prefer it, an ancestor of his, *has deliberately incorporated into his text a verse of Latin poetry* which he has then turned into Greek, following closely the order of the Latin verse."

The verbal critic will at once pounce upon the long *i* ending *viginti*. But let him remember that we have here neither Vergil nor Professor Mayor, but a second or a sixth century popular poet, and perhaps not much of a poet after all.

Harder to accept, much harder to most, will be the suggestion of so close a connection as this between Homer and the manuscripts of the Gospels. For it is not generally known how thoroughly saturated with Homer were the minds of men, educated and uneducated alike, in the early centuries of the Christian era. Says Dr. Hatch in his Hibbert Lectures : —

"The main subject-matter of literary education was the poets. They were read, not only for their literary, but also for their moral value. They were read as we read the Bible. They were committed to memory. The minds of men were saturated by them. A quotation from Homer or from a tragic poet was apposite on all occasions and in every kind of society. Dio Chrysostom, in an account of his travels, tells how he came to the Greek colony of the Borysthenitae, on the farthest borders of the empire, and found that even in those remote settlements almost all the inhabitants knew the *Iliad* by heart, and that they did not care to hear about anything else."

" Homer," says Professor Harris, " was the Bible of the expiring faith, and the staple of pagan education. It was no more strange that a scribe should gloss from Homer than that a modern writer should give a New Testament turn to his speech."

THE CHURCH AND GREEK CULTURE

But there is a fact of much greater pertinence to the subject, and it is perhaps even less widely known than that at a very early period in the history of the Christian Church, it was sought to make popular the leading facts of the Gospel history by turning them into Greek verse.

For this purpose the very language of Homer was largely employed Verses and half verses of the *Iliad and Odyssey* were mixed up with the words of the gospel narrative, the Homeric heroes stood side by side with the apostles, and references to the pagan Olympus were pressed into the service of the religion of Christ. The effort suited the taste of the time, and these curious patchworks became known by the name of Homeric Centones (Ομεροκεντρωνες).

" It is not generally known," says Professor Harris, " that these collections have exercised a very great influence over the primitive Christian literature. But such is the case, as I hope at some future time to demonstrate. As far as I know, no attention has been given to the subject, and I only refer to it here in order to point out that, when the Homeric Centonists went to work to write the story of our Lord's burial in Greek hexameters, they made the very same connection with Polyphemus as we find in the Codex Bezae."

For Mr. Rendel Harris has discovered the very source of the strange addition made by Codex Bezae to the narrative of the burial of our Lord. The stone which covered the entrance to the Lord's tomb has been compared with the great stone which Polyphemus rolls to the mouth of his cave. Of this we are told that it was such a great stone that two and twenty wagons would not be able to stir it (*Odyssey* ix. 240).

The bearing and the immense importance of this discovery will at once be seen. The peculiarities of Codex Bezae are due to the influence of the Latin version upon the Greek. It was Homer, not in his own tongue, but in a Latin translation, that was in the mind of the scribe. The line he quoted was a Latin hexameter. But having quoted it so, he proceeded at once to turn it into Greek.

For, according to the arrangement of his manuscript, the Greek on one page and the Latin on the other must correspond line for line. Here, then, is the easy but most effective way to resolve an enormous number of the singularities of the singular codex.

Begin with the Latin: It is a free and a popular translation. It bears the impress not only of the translator, but of his time.

Then turn to the Greek: It must conform line by line to the Latin version opposite. If it does not do so naturally, it is made to do so, with strange results at times. And finally, the one page acts and reacts upon the other, backwards and forwards, till it becomes a difficult but deeply interesting exercise to track the influences back again.

AN EXPLANATION SUGGESTED BY MILL

This is not a new discovery. That the Greek text of Codex Bezse had been influenced by the Latin was seen and asserted long ago by Mill.

But it was opposed by Griesbach, who " threw the whole weight of his great authority against the theory of latinisation." And Griesbach prevailed. So that now, even in Cambridge, it is regarded as an exploded fiction to speak of latinising.

But Mr. Rendel Harris works his theory out with so great an ability and a perseverance so exemplary, that not only does he compel acquiescence to the main point of it, but all through he delights the reader with the many fresh finds — textual, literary, and philological — of which he makes him a sharer.

The worth of this book is not confined to the student of Codex Bezae, or of textual criticism generally. It introduces welcome light into some dark comers of ecclesiastical history. And, though it may be least of all expected, it is a contribution of undoubted value to the history of human speech, especially of the Romance languages, at their obscurest and most intricate period.