

PALAEOGRAPHY AND ITS USES.

[An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Aberdeen on April 29, 1903.]

ON the establishment in the University of a new Lectureship, which should deal with Greek and Latin Palaeography, some have been moved to ask, 'What is it?'; even more perhaps to ask, 'What use is it?' It seems, therefore, not unfitting that the person who has been selected by the University Court to represent and expound this subject to students should, at the beginning of his first course of lectures, explain in a general way, such as it is hoped will appeal to open minds, both what palaeography exactly is, and the advantages which come from the pursuit of this study.

The advantage of the study of languages is generally admitted. If it be asked why we study languages, we must reply that the motives are many. Students, as a rule, study the ancient languages, because they have been compelled thereto by a system, wisely introduced by our ancestors, who realised how valuable they are as a training for the intellect. The ancient languages can also, however, be studied with a view to the apprehension of the thoughts treasured in the literature and even to the understanding of the ancient habit of mind. The student of ancient life in the external sense will read the authors for the information about manners, customs, and institutions which they contain. The motives for studying modern languages are to a certain extent the same, but there are differences. The training to the mind is not so great, but there is the overbalancing advantage that it is possible to visit the countries where persons speak these languages without effort in a perfectly natural way, and from intercourse with such to obtain pleasure, information, wider sympathies, and deeper thought. What is it that runs through the whole study of languages, ancient and modern? What alone is it that makes such study tolerable? It is the

touch of humanity pervading them. These languages were or are spoken by beings such as ourselves, with just those little differences, which allure us on to spend time in realising the characters of the people behind them. It is because speech is in the highest sense peculiar to human beings that the study of language has such charms for many minds.

And if speech is a peculiarity of human beings, much more is the concrete evidence of speech, the written word. I am afraid we do not often enough reflect on the grandeur, one might almost say the divinity, of language and writing. That a few scratchings of a pen, a few blows with a chisel, should be made a means of communication between one and many souls, a means of rousing the intellect, or thrilling the emotions, must be to all who think a fact calculated to arouse wonder. Writing may be said to be an even more glorious possession than speech. Human memories, though generally much more powerful in ancient than in modern times, could scarcely have preserved, amid the accidents of life and history, the most precious thoughts of man, especially as on the whole the greatest monuments of the world's literature are also the longest. Writing and books, 'the life-blood of master spirits,' may well be styled of all the possessions of humanity the most glorious, the outward sign of the higher life of man.

The beginnings of writing are hidden in the mists of antiquity. As research goes on, we shall learn more and more of its earliest stages; but it is unlikely that we shall ever be able to say that such and such a man, in such and such a place, in such and such a year, was the first to inscribe words which conveyed a definite meaning to another person. It does not fall within my scope or ability to deal with the alphabets of Eastern nations. It is, however, sufficiently certain that the Greeks derived their alphabet mostly from Phoenicians, with whom they came in contact, and that the Romans in turn derived theirs from the Greek colonists of South and Central Italy. When we reach the Latin writing of the republic, we are at the beginning of a history of writing, which can be traced by concrete examples from that time to the present day. Nearly all the hands of Europe, our own included, are descended by well-ascertained steps from the writing of the Romans. And while Latin writing has thus developed

itself, the Greek handwriting has in the East run its own course up to the present, and can be similarly traced. This is, in itself, the first reason why we ought to study palaeography. It is a department of history, and to understand how our own writing took its present form, we must know something of the writing of Western Europe for the past two thousand years.

Palaeography, secondly, can be studied from an artistic point of view. Writers are distinguished as beautiful, ugly, and those who are neither one nor the other. The ugly writer may be perfectly intelligible to the reader, and fulfils his purpose so far. But in every age of the world's history, and to a great degree in some ages, there have lived persons who have taken a pride in their writing and cultivated it to a high pitch of excellence. Excellence, in this department too, is quite independent of size. A handwriting need not be tiny to be elegant. Some of the larger inscriptions on stone, and similarly some of the largest hands in manuscripts, show a beauty of lettering which cannot be excelled by the smallest handwritings extant. Of all scribes the neatest have been those of the monasteries of the Latin Church in the Middle Ages. The enormous numbers of cloistered monks had to find employment, and many of them gained a livelihood for themselves and the means to distribute alms by copying manuscript books for the use of their own or other monasteries, and for the libraries of kings and nobles. At first the most that could be achieved was beauty of lettering. This can be studied now without inspection of actual ancient manuscripts in photogravure facsimiles of select leaves, such as our own and most University libraries contain. These are almost perfect copies of the originals. Later, the illumination of manuscripts was introduced. Most of us have seen one or more illuminated manuscripts. The arrangement of these lovely colours, which even after centuries dazzle the eye, is almost a lost art. The Irish were particularly distinguished in this connexion. An historian of the twelfth century tells how he saw at Kildare a manuscript of such intricately ornamental designs that it seemed rather to be the work of an angel than of a mortal man. The more closely he examined it, the more it excited his admiration¹.

¹ See Thompson, *Handbook of Greek and Latin Palaeography*, p. 240.

Not only were letters, especially initials, highly illuminated, but exquisite miniatures were introduced into the margins and other parts of the page. These frequently illustrate scenes of Holy Scripture, recording the interest of the passage or the piety of the writer. Those whom the author cannot enthrall, will find in these illustrations a charming field for novel research.

This leads me to mention what I may call a further fruit of the study of palaeography. The date of a manuscript, which is an important fact of our science, is often to be determined by the differences of handwriting which characterise successive ages; often minute, the habit of estimating such distinctions cultivates an almost indefinable quality of mind. What taste is for the critic of works of art, this is for the scholar. It is something akin to the right appreciation of the use of words and grammatical forms. It is something akin to a true estimate of the right proportion of the phrases of a musical theme. But it is neither of these. It is a power most resembling that by which we are enabled to say, 'Demosthenes could not have written this,' and again, 'this passage must be Cicero.' If the study of palaeography cultivated such judgement alone, it would be worth our while.

Let us turn now to the more objective advantages which come from the study of palaeography. These can be summed up in a word as the recovery of the true text of ancient documents, and the knowledge resulting therefrom. When we speak of the 'true' text, we do not mean literally true—such literal truth is perhaps never entirely attainable—but essentially true, and approximating as closely as may be to the literal truth. That such discovery of the true text need not be uninteresting to any one, let me prove by one or two examples. Take the name 'Grampians,' applied to our great range of mountains. If this name, which was first given to the range by Hector Boece, the first Principal of our University, be traced back to its origin, it will be found to rest on a misreading of a passage in Tacitus. In his copy of Tacitus, based on a late MS or late MSS, Boece found the expression *Mons Grampius*. This is now known from the discovery of better authority to be a mistake for *Mons Graupius*, the exact locality of which is unknown. Thus a scribe's

error, innocently repeated by a Principal of a Scottish University, has given its name to a great range of mountains. Again, the brave queen of the Iceni in East Anglia, was called in Latin Boudicca, the form with which we are familiar from Cowper's poem being a corruption in our later manuscripts. In both instances the corruption may be said to be an improvement upon the original in sound, but it is at least interesting to know on how slender foundations are built some of the most permanent associations of our lives. To turn to common nouns; there is an English word *celt*, meaning 'a cutting implement.' This word owes its origin to a misreading of a passage in the Vulgate version of the Book of Job, where *celte* appears for *certe*¹.

Greek and Latin manuscripts may be divided into, first, Biblical; second, Patristic, i. e. non-biblical, but Christian; third, those which are neither biblical nor patristic. The order in which I have mentioned the three classes may seem to some peculiar, but it is justified by the fact that with few exceptions the biblical excel the patristic, and the patristic the third class, in age, accuracy, and art.

A few words about the third class, to which we shall afterwards return. Nothing has been more remarkable in the history of learning than the steady production of editions of what are generally called the 'classical' authors. The present texts of these are based on a long succession of manuscript copies, supplemented by the labours of scholars in endeavouring to arrive at the true text which underlies the corruptions of these manuscripts. It is hardly too much to say that at the present time practically every copy of importance of every 'classical' author has been collated and valued, and that only the appearance of a new copy of importance or the few certain emendations which even the most thorough expert can hope to make, will produce any improvement in the existing form of the text. Yet no sane person will deny that many of our authors are still full of corruptions. Take, for example, Aeschylus among the Greek authors, and Propertius among the Latin. Have we then reached to the limit of the attainable in this direction? I think not.

¹ Lindsay, *Introduction to Latin Textual Emendation*, pp. 16 f.

Much advance can still be made, if scholars will only turn to the older and better manuscripts of the two former classes, and learn what they can from them. Meantime let us consider those first two classes, which are well worthy of study for their own sake.

First, then, the biblical manuscripts. As to the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, at least, we may congratulate ourselves that, owing to the labours of Tischendorf, Hort, Westcott, and others, we are in a very much surer position than our forefathers were. The oldest Greek copies, unknown to scholars of the eighteenth and previous centuries, have been carefully collated, and their readings made known to the world. We possess in Westcott and Hort's text one which has deserved and gained confidence everywhere. But much yet remains to be done. Later copies have been shown to be of real importance. They frequently derive from originals of equal antiquity with the great manuscripts, and show variant readings to the value of which only the prejudiced can be blind. Generations will have to work at these later manuscripts, and their classification is a necessity for the attainment of a truer text. The Greek version of the Old Testament, commonly called the Septuagint, has been most unworthily neglected until recent years. Both Oxford and Cambridge Universities have done splendid work in the endeavour to obtain the best possible text, a necessary preliminary to the study even of the New Testament, as this Septuagint was the Bible of the early Christians, was quoted habitually by St. Paul, and occasionally even by our Lord Himself. But the Latin manuscripts are hardly, if at all, less important, and here, there is a very wide field for investigation. Roughly speaking, we may say there were two Latin versions of the Bible in antiquity, the Old Latin, translated directly from the Greek, and the revision of it which Jerome made, called the Vulgate. Various portions of the Old Latin, which exist in manuscript, have been published from time to time, but they have not yet been unified so as to form anything like a complete text, since the middle of the eighteenth century. The great work of the Benedictine Sabatier can be vastly improved by later discoveries. As to the Vulgate, the Bishop of Salisbury and Mr. White have produced a sound text of the Gospels, and have the rest of the New

Testament in preparation. But there remains the whole of the Old Testament, in which the Vulgate text differs but little from the Old Latin.

Closely connected with the study of the biblical manuscripts is that of the patristic. The writings of the Fathers during the first eight centuries of the Christian era are in many respects of the highest value. There was a time, not far distant, when they were thought to exhibit a kind of ecclesiastical jargon unworthy of the name of Greek or Latin. In dictionaries, words were labelled 'ecclesiastical.' *Christianum est! non legitur.* Many men, of many countries and dispositions, were lumped together under this term. What are the facts? The best and most highly educated men of their time were those Fathers. Latin existed as a language spoken by ordinary people in many parts of Europe till the eighth century. Greek has never ceased. Why should the writings of the best men of that period be railed off from the non-Christian writings? Why should Latin be considered to cease at the year 150 A.D., Greek at 300 B.C.? The division is a most artificial one. We have been asked to believe that nothing really good was produced in either language after those dates. Just when the Roman Empire was passing through its best period of prosperity, people ceased to be able to write Latin! As well say that no one has been able to write English prose since the days of Bacon and Hooker! The Roman Empire developed between the time of Cicero and Marcus Aurelius in much the same way as the British Empire has developed since the sixteenth century. On such reasoning, De Quincey and Matthew Arnold, for example, would be condemned. The truth is that the Renaissance, good as it was in itself, was really Pagan in its character. Those who did most to popularise the newly found literature were men who in disgust or indifference kept apart from the Roman Church of the day, and we are the heirs of this division. We, who live in an enlightened country, which owes its greatness to the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the men whose spiritual nourishment they were, have foolishly neglected the most precious heritage of antiquity. This neglect has led to a carelessness in the production of their works. Had it not been for the Benedictine monks, who did all they could to restore Augustine, Ambrose, and others

to their original form, the works of the ancient teachers of the Church would be even in a much worse state than they are. The excuse cannot be given that the manuscripts are bad. They are, on the contrary, so good, that if almost any classical author existed in MSS of the age and quality, in which patristic works are preserved, the textual critics would have been saved much wearisome examination of late and poor copies, and their almost hopeless attempts to restore classical texts by the light of nature. Those authors whose text is best preserved owe this to the value placed upon them by the Church, for example, Plato, Virgil, and Juvenal. Only within the last forty years has a worthy attempt been made to gather in this rich harvest. These attempts are associated with the Academies of Vienna and Berlin. But the programmes of these learned institutions do not and cannot include more than a certain number of these authors, and there is much room still for the enterprise of British and American Universities. As an instance of the enormous gain which can be obtained from an examination of ancient copies as compared with more recent, there is the case of a fourth-century Latin work¹, which has come under my notice, the printed text of which can be improved by their aid in about three thousand places. It is not too much to say that it is possible to recover the very words of some of these authors in all but a few passages, a thing which is not possible in the case of most classical authors. Dr. Goldwin Smith left the classical field many years ago, because there was nothing more to be done². Only let the word 'classical' be extended in meaning or done away with altogether: there is work for hundreds of men in extracting from the many extant MSS the texts of valuable authors. And while the text of such authors is worth attaining for itself alone, the study is most valuable for the text of Scripture. All the Fathers quote Scripture largely, and the patristic quotations have long been recognized as of the utmost importance for the study of the text of the Bible. There is no use, however, in studying the printed editions of the Fathers for this purpose, except where they are

¹ The Pseudo-Augustinian *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti CXXVII* (Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* xxxv 2213 ff.).

² Prof. Mayor's *Latin Heptateuch*, p. lvi. I owe much to Professor Mayor's articles and prefaces, also to Professor Ramsay's advice (*Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 448 f.).

known to be based upon ancient or good MSS, whose readings are fully reported. The Bible as represented in Latin Fathers is as yet little known: when it is known, the Western Text, rejected by Westcott and Hort, will in all probability come to its own. Any one who will devote himself to such work, now made possible for the Universities of Scotland by post-graduate Scholarships and Fellowships, can with little trouble become an authority in his subject and gain the ear of learned Europe. Whereas, the person who confines himself to the production of an edition, however good, of a well-thumbed author, may remain unknown to fellow workers in other countries, just as Tyrrell and Purser's edition of Cicero's *Correspondence* remained unknown to Germany's greatest Ciceronian expert till about five years ago, or nearly twenty years after the publication of its first part. If any one imagines that to devote one's self to these later authors is to be a traitor to classical scholarship, to destroy one's taste, and unfits one for the writing or teaching of prose in the Demosthenic or Ciceronian style, let him hearken to the witness of the greatest scholars. The great scholars of the past few centuries, who have made the most valuable contributions to scholarship, have been equally at home in both classical and sacred philology. This is true of Erasmus, Bentley, Porson, Lachmann, Haupt, Lightfoot, Hort, Field, the brothers Mayor, and others. I do not say that their greatness is entirely owing to their breadth of view, but I maintain that breadth of view and width of reading are the necessary preludes to good and sane work in a scholar's career. The man who, by ascending the mountain, gets the wide view of plain beneath, is best able to choose a suitable point for a residence. This is true of scholarship also. Narrow its view and it becomes blind.

To return to classical study. Our method has been all wrong. We have plunged young children into very difficult authors, who, apart from the difficulty of language, lived in different surroundings, and thought in different ways from ourselves. The result has been to torture them and in the end to leave them with a few scraps of grammatical knowledge, but no healthy power of reading and enjoying authors for themselves. The natural method, which we ought to have followed, is to begin with the easy, and go on

to the more difficult. The Bible itself, and many of the Fathers in both languages, are very easy to follow. The child is acquainted with Christian ideas from the first. Let him first approach the ideas with which he is familiar, and he will then naturally go on to the comprehension of the strange ideas, which are difficult to grasp. The same applies to palaeography. The late classical manuscripts have been microscopically examined. Take Propertius as an example. The oldest MS of his poems is about fourteen hundred years removed from his autograph. How can one hope to attain to a correct text, or anything like a correct text? Clearly not by examining the late manuscripts further, for that will only add to the number of hideous errors committed by scribes. The method is to examine carefully the manuscripts of later authors, removed from the authors' autographs by only one, two, three, four hundred years, as the case may be, and traceable perhaps through one medium only to the autograph itself. Every manuscript has errors. Classify those errors systematically, indicating the date of the MS and the country in which it was written. No one man can be expected to spend his life or all his leisure examining the mistakes of manuscripts, but each person who edits one text could easily give a list of the errors he had found in a left-hand column and the correct forms in a right-hand column, the former arranged in alphabetical order. These could afterwards be collected into a dictionary of errors, which would be of the highest use for the man who would remove the corruptions of the classical authors. It is much more scientific to make a list of errors that have actually been made than to show that such and such a mistake could have been made. And this is not all the advantage which would accrue to classical authors from the study of early MSS of later authors. The orthography of the former would be greatly improved. Very few manuscripts of classical authors can be trusted in regard to orthography. After the eleventh century Latin orthography is a hopeless muddle. It is true that some of the monstrosities of modern printed texts never or very rarely appear, even in the worst MSS, but still the manuscripts after the year 1100 are often not trustworthy. The manuscripts of Fathers, however, often guide us to the actual spelling employed by them in the third, fourth, or fifth centuries, and from this we can safely reason

back to the spellings of the classical period, as the differences in spelling between the two periods were of the most trifling description. It is thus that we can recover forms which would otherwise be lost to us, and which shed a flood of light as well on the Latinity of classical times as on the etymology of Latin words. The same is true, but probably in a less degree, of Greek. The study of the later language helps the study of the earlier in many ways. Blass has drawn valuable material for Demosthenic criticisms from later authors such as Dio Cassius, Libanius, and Isidore of Pelusium, who were influenced by Demosthenes; and his results would be still more valuable, if we were in possession of a trustworthy text in every case.

I have perhaps said enough to show how such a study appeals to the scholar that undertakes it. It may not be on a par with the interpretation, or the translation—in the true sense of the word—of the great authors of antiquity; but it has for those who pursue it a fascination equal to those greater high-roads of scholarship. And many who could not traverse the latter, will find themselves at home in the journeyman work of manuscript-collation. What help I can give to those who are ready to undertake this humbler path will be readily given, and, I hope, willingly accepted.

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