

# BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

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## ARTICLE I.

### ANCIENT TESTIMONY TO THE EARLY CORRUPTION OF THE GOSPELS.

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THE history of our Gospel text in common use and acceptance can be traced clearly as far back as the year 382 A.D., when St. Jerome fixed it at the request of his patron, Damasus, Bishop of Rome. St. Jerome's work has a preface which gives us in the matter of Gospel revision some highly important testimony.

THE TESTIMONY OF ST. JEROME is part of a letter addressed to his patron, and begins:—

" You compel me to make a new work out of an old one. . . . I am to pick out those readings that agree with the Greek truth. It is a pious duty; but dangerous and presumptuous. In judging I shall be judged by all. . . . Learned and unlearned alike will call me a ' falsifier ' and ' sacrilegious ' for daring to amplify or alter or correct what is found in their old books. Against this outcry two things console me: first, *thou, who art the High Priest, orderest it to be done*; and, secondly, the truth has no variations — a fact which their very clamor against me goes to prove. If Latin MSS. are to be trusted, let them tell me which they are; for there are almost as many differing copies as there are codices. But if the truth is to be recovered from this diversity, then *why not go back to the original Greek?* "

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And St. Jerome proceeds to tell us how he had taken over his new chapter divisions from Alexandria, but he does not state — what honesty demanded he should have done — that he had adopted his new standard Greek text from Alexandria also. His preface to Bishop Damasus ends with these words:—

*“Opto ut in Christo ualeas et memineris mei, Papa beatissime”* (“I desire that in Christ thou mayst be well, and that thou mayst remember me, O Most Blessed Father”).

St. Jerome's work was *done by command, and done too hastily to be final*. It is true that he stopped the process of MS. corruption from proceeding any further; but his work and that of his Bishop *did not remove from the text past corruptions, but only preserved them, and, as it were, consecrated them*. That such corruptions already existed and had been accumulating since the death of the Apostles, is proved not only by St. Jerome's statement of the chaotic condition of *all Latin texts* (and why, pray, not of all Greek texts?); but also by the testimony of many documents that have come down to us, and a part of this testimony we shall now exhibit.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. (1) St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, warns them against accepting as his any forged letter that declared the Day of the Lord was at hand (2 Thess. ii. 2). And again, at the end of the same Epistle, he says that his own signature is the sign whereby his true writings may be known by his converts.

(2) St. John, at the close of the Apocalypse, warns those who add to the things he has written, that God will add to them the plagues described in his book, and those who take away from what is written will have their names taken out of the Book of Life (Rev. xxii. 18, 19).

IN THE CLEMENTINE HOMILIES. These writings were believed by St. Jerome and Rufinus, and by all scholars until about two hundred years ago, to be the genuine letters of that Clement who was an Elder at Rome in the first century. They profess to be Clement's account of what he heard from St. Peter himself, and tell us how St. Peter took Clement with him on his journeys, and, dying, ordained him by the laying on of his hands to be his successor and the second Bishop of Rome. The Homilies are now acknowledged to be forgeries, dating from about 150 A.D., and probably originating not in Rome, but in Syria.

In the Second Homily (chap. 38) Clement reports St. Peter's words as follows:—

*"Multa quippe mendacia contra Deum accepit Scriptura, hac ratione: cum propheta Moyses ex Dei consilio septuaginta electis legem tradidisset ut et ipsi eos qui uellent e populo instruerent, non multo post scripta lex recepit quædam falsa contra unicum Deum; id auso diabolo facere ob iustam quamdam rationem"* ("Scripture has received many false passages which are contrary to God. For when the prophet Moses, by the counsel of God, made over the law to seventy chosen ones, that they might teach those of the people who wished to learn, soon afterward the copies of the law received certain falsifications contrary to the only God, the devil having dared to do this for a very good reason").

Later, in chapter 51 of the same Homily we read:—

*"Petrus addidit: Si ergo in Scripturis alia uera sunt, alia falsa, recte Magister noster dixit: Estote probi trapezitæ. Cum nempe quædam in Scripturis dicta proba sint, quædam adulterina. Et hominibus qui ob falsas Scripturas errabant, proprie erroris indicauit causam, dicens: Ideo erratis nescientes uera Scripturarum; propter quod ignoratis et uirtutem Dei"* ("Peter said further: If then in Scripture some things are true and some things false, well hath our Master said: Be ye truth-discerning money-changers. For some sayings of Scripture are true; others are not genuine. And to those who erred by reason of false Scriptures, He showed the cause of their error when He said, For this reason ye err, because ye know not the true Scriptures; and therefore ye know not the power of God").

And in the Third Homily we find these words put into the mouth of St. Peter:—

*"Scripturarum mendacia iure ad hominum probationem posita sunt"* ("The false readings of Scripture are rightly placed there to test men").

These Homilies on which the Church of Rome for a thousand years based her claims as being the genuine sayings of St. Peter are now universally admitted to be forgeries from beginning to end; but they are, nevertheless, valuable as showing us what religious thoughts were current in the middle of the second century from which they take their rise. St. Peter is proclaimed as early as 150 A.D. in the Homilies to have been enthroned at Rome with the power to bind and to loose conferred on him by Christ. The question here arises, Did our Gospels *originate* (in which case they must have been *already* interpolated), or merely *take over*, this stupendous power bequeathed to St. Peter in the Homilies and to his heirs and assigns only? Until we discover a first-century MS. of the Gospels which has lain hidden from ecclesiastical eyes since the first century, we cannot hope to answer this question. The Homilies prove that the primacy of St. Peter was fully established in tradition as early as 200 A.D., and in writings that go back to an even earlier date it is found explicitly stated.

IN IRENÆUS, BISHOP OF LYONS. Before the close of the second century of the Christian era, we find Irenæus obliged to protect his writings from mutilation and alteration by affixing to them a solemn adjuration, which Eusebius in his "Church History" has preserved for us. It was appended to his lost work on the Ogdoad, and reads as follows:—

*"Adiuvo te qui transcriperis librum hunc per Dominum nos-*

*trum Jesum Christum et aduentum Eius in gloria cum ueniet indicare uiuos et mortuos, ut conferas hæc quæ scribis et emendes diligenter ad exemplaria de quibus transcripseris ad fidem: et ut sacramentum adiurationis huius similiter transcribas et inseras his quæ transcripsisti* ("Whoever thou art that copiest this book, I adjure thee by our Lord Jesus Christ, and His coming in glory to judge the quick and the dead, that thou compare what thou writest with the exemplar, and make it agree faithfully therewith, and that thou transcribe this oath of adjuration and insert it in the copy that thou hast made").

IN TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE. In his work against Marcion, written *circa* 200 A.D., Tertullian tells us that heretical teachers and preachers with new-fangled notions altered and mutilated the Scriptures to make them serve as textbooks for disseminating their new views of what *ought to have been written* by prophets and evangelists. Marcion dispensed with documents, and set up a verifying faculty of his own. Marriage was unchristian; therefore the epistles to Timothy and Titus, inculcating marriage, were discarded by him as non-christian, and therefore non-Pauline. "*Quis tam comesor mus Ponticus quam qui euongelia conrosit?*" ("What Pontic mouse was such a gnawer as he who has gnawed away the Gospels?"), says Tertullian in one of his epigrammatic outbursts. Marcion was born at Pontus in Asia Minor *circa* 120 A.D. He afterwards found his way to Rome. His teaching spread to Alexandria and Carthage; and his spurious and doctored Gospel was a much greater menace to the early Christian Church than the open opposition of such wholly pagan writers as Cerinthus and Celsus.

IN THE MURATORI CANON. This is a list of the books of the New Testament preserved in a sixth-century MS. in the Ambrosian Library at Milan. It has been published by the

present writer in the *Journal of Theological Studies* (vol. viii. pp. 540 ff.). It is really a second-century religious pamphlet, having been written at Rome about the year 160 A.D. It refers to a forged Epistle of St. Paul to the Alexandrians, as well as to the better-known spurious Epistle of his to the Laodiceans, and declares that they are not accepted in the Church as genuine:—

*“Fertur etiam ad Laudicenses, alia ad Alexandrinos Pauli nomine finctæ ad heresem Marcionis: et alia plura quæ in Catholica Ecclesia recipi non potest”* (“In addition to his genuine writings, there are going around an Epistle to the Laodiceans and another to the Alexandrians, forged under the name of Paul, to counteract the heresy of Marcion. And there are several other forgeries besides these which cannot be received into the Catholic Church”).

If it were possible to invent whole books in the name of St. Paul and other writers of the New Testament, and pass them off on the unwary as genuine, until the fraud was by men like Tertullian detected, how much easier to invent single verses and insert them into the Apostles' writings with less fear of the fraud from its smallness being discovered, especially if it commended itself to those in authority!

The Muratori Canon was brought to light by Muratori in 1740, after having been transferred to Milan from the dispersed library of the monastery at Bobbio, near Turin, founded by the Irish St. Columban. The Canon, which is a MS. and not a man, is an historical witness of first importance. It tells us concerning the apocryphal book, the Pastor of Hermas, that it was written “quite lately (*nuperima*) in Rome during the bishopric of Pius.” This Pius died *circa* 150 A.D., and so the date of the composition of the Canon is close around that year. The writer of the Canon speaks of our four Gospels *as already well known*, and says

that St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul, wrote the third Gospel, and that St. John, the Apostle, at the request of St. Andrew and others, wrote the fourth Gospel. He refers to the writings of the early heretics Arsinous, Valentinus, Miltiades, Marcion, Basilides, and Montanus, and also to a body of men who compiled a "New Book of the Psalms" for Marcionite congregations. All these writings the Church rejected, he tells us, in their entirety; but the very mention of them shows us how false Gospels and Epistles and Psalm-books swarmed at Rome around the true Scriptures before 150 A.D., and through what a sea of MS. emendators and MS. corrupters the New Testament writings passed before 382 A.D., when St. Jerome took them in hand.

IN ORIGEN. Origen (185-253) has left a letter, preserved by St. Jerome's opponent, Rufinus, which testifies to what he suffered at the hands of those who corrupted the text of his writings. The letter is printed by Migne in "Patrologia Græca" (vol. xvii. coll. 625, 626), from which I translate it in full as follows:—

"LETTER OF ORIGEN TO HIS FRIENDS IN ALEXANDRIA ON THE ADULTERATION OF HIS WRITINGS.

"Certain men, who take pleasure in defaming their neighbors, ascribe to me and my teaching a blasphemy, which they have never heard from me; but let them take heed to what they do, and no longer ignore the commandment which saith, *Evil-speakers shall not inherit the Kingdom of God* [1 Cor. vii. 10]. They say that I assert that the devil, who is the father of wickedness and perdition, and of those cast out of the Kingdom of God, will be saved. This no one can assert, unless he has taken leave of his senses, and is stark mad.

"But I am not surprised that my teaching is thus mixed up with falsehood by my enemies, and corrupted with the same leaven as were the Epistles of the Apostle Paul. For certain men, using Paul's name, forged an Epistle to terrify the Thessalonians as

though the Day of the Lord were at hand, and endeavored in this way to pervert them. Wherefore in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians the Apostle wrote these words: We beg you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not quickly moved from your former mind, neither be ye terrified, neither by any spirit, nor by any word, nor by any letter as coming from us, that the Day of the Lord is at hand. Let no one pervert you by any such artifices.

"Such devices I have seen in my own experience; for a certain teacher of false teaching, after he received, from those who reported it, the copy of a Disputation between him and myself before many hearers, added what he wished, cancelled what he wished, changed what he had a mind to, and then made it public under my name, and outrageously passed off as mine whole passages which he himself had written. The brethren in Palestine were indignant at the man's action, and sent a messenger to me, when I was in Athens, to obtain from me the true copy. This copy I had neither read nor corrected since it was made, and had some difficulty in finding. Nevertheless I sent it; and God is witness that when I met the man who had adulterated the book, and asked him why he had done it, as though it were a sufficient answer he replied: 'I wished to polish that Disputation and to prune it.'

"He polished and pruned it *as Marcion pruned the Gospels* and the works of the Apostle Paul; and as his follower Apelles did after him. For as those men subverted the truth of the Scriptures, so likewise this man took away what I really said, and inserted what was false, to procure my condemnation. Although such things are the work of men who are heretics and ungodly, nevertheless they also will incur God's judgment who give credence to these men's wicked forgeries as proceeding from me.

"Others have done this same thing before, wishing to break up congregations. On another occasion, when I was at Ephesus, a certain false teacher encountered me, who would not hold a public Disputation with me, nor did he open his mouth in my presence; but for some reason avoided all speech with me. Afterwards, in my name and his own he wrote out a Disputation to suit his own mind, and sent copies of it to his followers, even those in Rome (as I learned later) receiving it, and I doubt not but that he sent it to his followers in other places. In Antioch he acted in the same bold way before I came there, so that copies of the Disputation which he carried with him were put into the hands of as many of the brethren as possible. On my coming to Antioch I faced him and convicted him before many witnesses. And when,



with no shame whatever, he persevered in impudently asserting what was false, I requested that the Book in question might be produced and that its contents might be vouched for by the brethren, 'who know (I said) what I am wont to say in my Disputations and what is the teaching that I give.' When he did not dare to produce the book, he was convicted by all, and his forgeries were refuted; and so the brethren refused to listen to the wicked statements he had brought against me as though they were mine.

"If a man will believe me, who speak as in God's sight, let him not believe those things which have been forged and inserted in my writings. But if he will not believe me, but prefers to speak evil of me, he does not really harm me; nevertheless, that man is a false witness in God's sight, whether he actively bears false witness against his neighbor, or merely gives an ear to others that bear it."

This is a most human and illuminating document, and should make us careful not to deduce Origen's faith from the testimony of those who were his enemies, and desired to secure, at all costs, his condemnation as a heretic. Rufinus writes a long commentary on this letter, and answers those who said that Origen might have altered his convictions from time to time. He points out that Origen is made to show contradictions not in his earlier as distinguished from his later works, *but in the very same work and often on the same page*. Origen states that the Holy Spirit is never in Scripture said to have been made or created. Then follows in some MSS. a statement, as though by Origen, that the Holy Spirit "was made." Origen states that the Father and the Son are of one essence or substance. Then follows a statement, attributed to him, that the Son of God "was created." Origen states that the body is raised. Then follows a statement under his name that the body is not raised. Can we believe, adds Rufinus, that a man in the same book, and even sometimes in the very next paragraph, could have forgotten his own views?

Rufinus proceeds to write the following passage, which is

worth meditating on by all who are seeking after the truth from the writings of the Church Fathers as now extant:—

*“Haec exempla patris sui atque hanc artem magistri sui secuti hæretici, quoscumque ueterum nobilium tractatorum inuenerunt de his quæ ad gloriam Dei pertinent plene et fideliter disputasse, ita ut ex lectione ipsorum unusquisque fidelium proficere possit et instrui, non pepercerunt scriptis eorum uenenatum uirus infundere, siue interpolando quæ dixerant, siue quæ non dixerant inserendo, quo facilius uidelicet sub nomine doctissimi cuiusque et nobilis inter scriptores ecclesiasticos uiri, hæresis suæ astrueretur assertio, ex eo quod ita sensisse etiam aliqui de claris uiris et catholicis uiderentur”* (Patrologia Græca, vol. xvii. col. 620) (“Heretics have followed the examples given them by their father, and the artifices of their instructor. For whenever they have found any of the noble old commentators to have fully and faithfully written concerning the Glory of God against heretics, so that by reading the same everyone among the faithful might be profited and instructed, they have not failed to infuse into these writings deadly poison, either by enlarging what was said or inserting what was not said, in order that their false teaching might more easily be slipped in under the name of some man who was learned and noble among ecclesiastical writers, because they then declared that certain renowned and widely-read Church authors held the same views as themselves”).

IN RUFINUS. Rufinus, who was a contemporary of St. Jerome, has left on record an adjuration against the corrupters of texts, which may be found in his prologue to the translation he made of Origen’s work “On First Principles” (*περι αρχων*):—

*“Illud sane omnem qui hos libros descripturus est, uel lecturus, in conspectu Dei Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti contestor atque coniuuro, per futuri regni fidem, per resurrectionis ex mortuis sacramentum, per illum qui preparatus est diabolo et angelis eius æternum ignem . . . ne auferat, ne inserat, ne inmutet; sed conferat cum exemplaribus unde scripserit, et emendet ad litteram, et distinguat; et inemendatum uel non distinctum codicem non habeat, ne sensuum difficultas, si distinctus codex non sit, maiores obscuritates legentibus generet”* (“This I beg and adjure, in the sight of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whoever shall copy

or read these books, — by the faith of the future kingdom, by the mystery of the resurrection from the dead, by the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, — that he take away nothing, insert nothing, change nothing; but compare what he has written with the exemplar from which he has copied it, and correct it to the letter and punctuate it, and not to keep an uncorrected or unpunctuated copy, lest the difficulty of the sense create more obscurity, than need be, for the readers”).

IN EUSEBIUS OF CÆSAREA. Eusebius, who wrote the Life of Constantine, and attended the Council of Nicæa in 325 A.D., shall be the last witness to the *cacoethes mutilandi et adulterandi* (“zeal for mutilation and corruption”) that prevailed among the false teachers of the first three centuries. The adjuration of Eusebius is in Greek and is affixed to his “Chronica.” It may be found in Migne’s “Patrologia Græca” (vol. xxviii. col. 39). Eusebius seems to have copied in part the adjuration of St. Irenæus. The following is a literal translation of the words of Eusebius:—

“I adjure thee, whoever thou art that copiest these books, by our Lord Jesus Christ and His Glorious Advent, when He will come to judge the quick and the dead, that thou compare what thou hast written, and emend it diligently according to the exemplar from which thou hast copied it; and that thou transcribe this oath of adjuration, and insert it in the copy that thou hast made.”

These extracts from the great Church Fathers previous to St. Jerome, or from his contemporaries, are deserving of careful study by every Scripture student. They have not been collected with a view to invalidating the historical Gospels, but with a view to showing through what a sea of heresy and Scripture mutilation our Gospels had passed before St. Jerome fixed them in the year 382 A.D. That we find certain specific lines of mutilation, in accord with certain heretical tenets, is not surprising. The early heretics — Docetæ, Es-

senes, Marcionites, Ebionites — have all left the marks of their teeth on the Sacred Scriptures. And Marcion was not the first or only “mouse” to gnaw away the distinctive teaching of the Gospels of Jesus Christ. The second and third centuries produced many Marcions; and it may be that the mischief they did will never be entirely undone.

When Dr. Hort proclaimed that “*any undetected discrepancies from the autographs which the text [as restored by Drs. Westcott and Hort] may contain may safely be treated as insignificant,*” he was endeavoring in all good faith — for he made *no personal examination of MSS.* and the mutilations they have undergone — to lull us into a false security. The discrepancies between the Westcott and Hort text and the Western text, whose readings Dr. Hort chose to regard as no readings at all, but the work of pious scribes, are far from insignificant. The omission from St. Luke of the words, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do,” is not an insignificant omission. Nor is the omission from St. John of the passage concerning the woman taken in adultery insignificant. Nor is the omission of the end verses of the Gospel of St. Mark insignificant. These omissions by Aleph and B and their small band of allies can be traced to the work of Egyptian revisers of the third century, who corrupted the Gospel. In the second century the passages excised by Drs. Westcott and Hort were received as authentic by Irenæus in Gaul, by Tertullian in Africa, by Tatian in Syria, and throughout the whole of Christendom.

We have lived, in the twentieth century, to see the testimony of men of the second century, who saw face to face the followers of the Apostles, discarded in favor of a handful of Egyptian MSS. that witness to a revision of the Gospels made by the *illuminati* of Alexandria. These men, having

imbibed the spirit of speculation of the catechetical school founded by Origen, out-Origened Origen himself in following MSS. that had been "polished and pruned." Thanks be to God, the worst MS. that Alexandria ever produced contains all the essentials of the Christian faith. Our quest, pursued during the last eighteen years, is not for proofs that invalidate the historic truth of the Gospels, else it would be in vain; but for the *ipsissima verba* of Christ in all the Gospels before they underwent revision and corruption. And this quest is yet far from attainment; for these words are to-day scattered throughout the MSS. not of Egypt alone, but of the whole ancient world as it was known to St. Paul and other Roman travelers.

To sit down and rest content with the text of Aleph and B is not a safe or wise procedure. Aleph and B do not represent the first edition of the Gospels, but more nearly the fiftieth. Had the words of Jesus Christ been faithfully transmitted to us as they left His lips, there would never have been occasion during the past centuries for so many dissensions among His followers. Those who base systems of theology on isolated texts, first found in Egyptian and Roman MSS., *none of which is earlier than three hundred years after the death of the Evangelists themselves*, are building on a perilous and sandy foundation. *The whole spirit of the teaching of Jesus Christ is the all-important thing*, and of that, as has been said, none of the fifty thousand extant MSS. of the Gospels, whether emanating from Egypt and Rome or from Britain and Spain, leaves us in any doubt.

It is well to remember that although the Version of St. Jerome conquered the world, its victory was protested against by at least two great scholars — St. Augustine and the Venerable Bede. St. Augustine in Africa refused to use St. Je-

rome's Vulgate; and the Venerable Bede in Britain, three hundred and fifty years later, preferred the British text to the Version of St. Jerome, even after he had been told that it had been made at Rome from the Apostles' own Greek originals, which the Pope had in his keeping. Bede's protest may be found in his "Retractationes in Act. Apost.," from which work we translate the following:—

"Those readings which are different from our text in the Greek [followed by the Vulgate], as well as the added verses and the verses omitted, we have briefly but carefully noted. Whether these verses were left out or altered by the fault of the translator [St. Jerome], or were depraved or dropped by the carelessness of copyists, we have not been able yet to ascertain. *For I do not dare to conjecture that the Greek original document [before its translation by St. Jerome] underwent falsification (falsatum fuisse).* And so I advise the reader to take note of the novelties [of the Vulgate] for the sake of erudition; *but not to insert them in his copy as emendations, unless he has found them anciently thus translated in a Latin MS. of the same family as his own [i.e., British].*"

The clash between the Old-Latin and the Vulgate of St. Jerome was painful and mysterious to the Venerable Bede in 735 A.D. After Bede's death, the Vulgate's claim to represent in Latin the Apostolic originals seems until our own day never to have been challenged. Men believed, on the authority of the Church of Rome, that St. Jerome, in 382 A.D., out of a multitude of divergent texts selected the original one every time, and rejected additions and restored omissions — all with the same infallible judgment. But we have not so learned Church history.

Men's doctrines of the Church, especially the doctrines of sacerdotalism and exclusivism, melt away as we push our explorations *behind the Vulgate*, and the message of the universality of God's grace and love to us in Christ becomes surprisingly clear when the corruptions introduced into the Gos-

pels by human selfishness and self-interest are cleared away. Neither St. Jerome in the fourth century, nor Dr. Hort in the nineteenth, can deter us, either by the power of Church authority, or by an unconvincing philosophical ratiocination, from still seeking more light from the ancient MSS. on the original wording of the Gospel, remembering the promise of our Master: *QUAERITE ET INVENIETIS* ("Seek, and ye shall find"); *PULSATE ET APERIETUR VOBIS* ("Knock, and it shall be opened to you").