

CHAPTER VII.

THE VATICAN AND SINAITIC MSS.

81. Two very different estimates have been formed of the weight due to these two earliest MSS. compared with all of later times. Most recent critics exalt them to almost absolute supremacy, which reduces all the five hundred others to complete insignificance. Tischendorf gives the palm to the Sinaitic, his own discovery. He assigns it such weight that in his 8th edition he has altered the text of his 7th edition in 3369 places, chiefly from deference to this one added witness. Drs Westcott and Hort decidedly prefer the Vatican. But they say of both that we ought to be very thankful for their exceptional excellence, and that few of their own age can have been so pure. The final result of their discussion on the formation and mixture of texts is that a vast numerical majority of witnesses must be treated as having no primary authority. The right method of recovering the true text, in their judgment, differs by a mere shade from what it would be if the 480 MSS. from century IX. onward had perished altogether.

82. Dr Scrivener dissents in part, and Dean Burgon and Mr MacClellan more entirely, from this exclusive trust in two or three, or five at most, of the oldest MSS. The

last speaks of the servile deference paid to these two survivors of the fourth century, which threatens us, he says, with bondage to a corrupt Egyptian text. The Dean observes that much is required in the way of further collation of MSS., Versions, and Fathers, before textual criticism can emerge from its present infancy. "When this has been done, the plausible hypothesis, on which recent recensions of the text have for the most part been conducted, will be found no longer tenable, and the latest decisions in consequence will be generally reversed."

83. I agree mainly with these remarks. But I do not think the principles followed by most recent critics so much as plausible. Their entire error, when submitted to strict inquiry, seems to me a matter of demonstration, if we combine all the real data, and set aside a large amount of unproved hypothesis and loose conjecture, by which those data have been obscured and overlaid. Those principles, too, when carried out to their logical results, involve a complete undermining of all historical certainty as to the true text of the New Testament, which many of the able scholars who have adopted them would be among the first to deprecate and deplore. And I think it possible, from Dr Tischendorf's own labours, to obtain data for a full refutation of his own excessive estimate of these two early MSS., although shared by Dean Alford, and Drs Tregelles, Westcott, and Hort, and almost imposed on us as a matter of moral and religious obligation to receive.

84. Tischendorf's edition of the Sinaitic MS. in 1865 gives us the text, altered in 190 places in the Gospels to exclude some manifest errors, where he replaces the reading *à primâ manu* by one of the countless self-corrections that are one great feature of the MS. Three sets of notes are attached. The first gives these self-corrections, or varia-

tions of the MS. from itself. The second gives the different readings of B or the Vatican, and the third those of Stephen's Edition, or the usually Received Text.

The Four Gospels contain $1071 + 678 + 1151 + 880$ or 3780 verses, and $2560 + 1616 + 2740 + 2024$ or 8940 *στίχοι*. The words are about 67000, or $19100 + 12600 + 20300 + 15000$. But the passages Mar. xvi. 9—20, Joh. vii. 53—viii. 11, are wanting in both MSS., and contain 12 verses each and about 30 *στίχοι* or clauses of six words each, and 360 words. When these are deducted the basis of calculation will be as follows.

85. The numbers for the Four Gospels will be these :

Verses	$1071 + 666 + 1151 + 868 = 3756;$
Στίχοι	$2560 + 1586 + 2740 + 1994 = 8880;$
Clauses	$3213 + 2006 + 3453 + 2608 = 11280;$
Diff ^s . of Σ and Α	$404 + 226 + 496 + 443 = 1569;$
„ of Σ and B	$835 + 638 + 952 + 1043 = 3468;$
„ of Σ and R	$1074 + 1030 + 1471 + 1176 = 4751;$
Corrections of Σ	$48 + 28 + 73 + 41 = 190.$

But in comparing MSS., to determine their relative purity or proportions of error, no corrections can be introduced without falsifying the problem. Hence the numbers of the last row must be added to the two above, and they become

Diff ^s . of Σ and B	$883 + 666 + 1025 + 1084 = 3658;$
Diff ^s . of Σ and R	$1122 + 1058 + 1544 + 1217 = 4941.$

86. Now if we take the *στίχος* for the unit, we shall have for **Σ** and B differences 3658, agreements 5222; and for **Σ** and R, differences 4941, agreements 3939. Hence, on the hypothesis most favourable to the two MSS., that they are invariably right when they agree, and assigning half of their differences as the only errors of each, the

ratio is 7051 + 1829, giving ratio of the altered part to the rest .2594, answering to rather more than 9 centuries in the medium or probable scale. If we take the clause of six words, or one-third of a verse, as the unit, the ratio in the same extreme case will be 9451 + 1829, or .19352, answering to $7\frac{1}{8}$ centuries in the same scale.

Of the differences above, 1950 are common, in which B and R agree in their deviation from \aleph , so that the differences of B and R are only 2991, while those of \aleph and R are 4941, a proportion of 3 to 5. Dividing their differences 3658 in this ratio as a more probable distribution, we have 1372 for the errors of B and 2286 for those of \aleph , and $1372 \div 9908$ and $2286 \div 8994$ for the fraction of error in each. This is .1384 for B and .2542 for \aleph , and answers to $5\frac{1}{4}$ and $9\frac{1}{2}$ centuries respectively. In this extreme hypothesis, which assigns to B and \aleph infallible excellence when they agree, and distributes their certain errors between them in the ratio of their divergence from the Received Text, the weight of B is .860 and that of \aleph .595 by the table, that of a MS. of the 11th century being .462, and of cent. xv. .428. In other words, on the hypothesis most favourable to the early MSS., and specially to the Vatican, its weight is exactly that of two MSS. of the 15th century, while the Sinaitic weighs only one-third more than an average MS. of the eleventh century, or of index 12 in the table.

87. But the idea that all the differences of the Received Text from both B and \aleph , in number 2991, are due to its fault and not to theirs, is plainly preposterous. Let us next assume that one-fifth only are faults of B and \aleph , and let these be added to 1708 and 1950, the number of B's differences from both \aleph and R, and of \aleph 's differences from both B and R. Then 2304 and 2548 will be the num-

ber of faulty clauses in the two MSS. and the fractions of error $\cdot 2566$ and $\cdot 2918$ respectively. These correspond to $9\frac{1}{2}$ and $10\frac{1}{2}$ centuries in the scale.

88. But if we make the Received Text, provisionally, of equal weight to either of the two MSS., or their conjoint weight as 2 to 1, then one-third of its differences from both will probably be right, or 997 must be added to their errors, proved by their divergence alone. The two numbers will then be 2705 and 2947, or assuming them equal 2826, and the ratio of error $2826 \div 8454$, or one-third and upward, and answers to an index of $11\frac{2}{3}$ centuries in the scale.

89. These conclusions, from the internal evidence of the divergences of the two MSS., on which Dean Burgon has insisted in general terms, may be thus given in a tabular form. The 3658 differences of B and \aleph may be divided equally between them, or in the ratio of their respective disagreements with the Received Text, and taken either as their whole error, or else increased by one-fifth or one-third of the cases where their joint authority is opposed to the Received Text. The answering errors, out of 11280 clauses, will be 1829, 1372, 2286; 2427, 1970, 2884; 2826, 2369, and 3283. The resulting fractions of error are $\cdot 1935$, $\cdot 1384$ and $\cdot 2542$; $\cdot 27414$, $\cdot 2566$ and $\cdot 2918$; $\cdot 3342$, $\cdot 2658$ and $\cdot 4105$. These, in the $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. scale, answer to $7\frac{1}{6}$, $5\frac{1}{4}$, $9\frac{1}{6}$ centuries in the first case, $9\frac{4}{8}$, $9\frac{1}{6}$ and $10\frac{1}{2}$ in the second, and $11\frac{2}{3}$, $9\frac{1}{2}$ and 14 centuries in the third.

The scale provisionally assumed before, which ascribes a decline equal to 10 mean centuries to the date A. D. 300, and $9\frac{1}{2}$ to the date A. D. 350, is thus shewn not to be excessive, and is equalled or exceeded by the errors of the only two survivors of that date, as proved by their divergence alone, together with a moderate estimate of

their probable errors in their cases of common divergence from the reading of the Received Text.

90. The same general conclusion may be put in another way, which is perhaps still more striking. The interval of time from the date of the Gospels to that of these MSS., referring them to the middle of the fourth century, is 290 years. Now if the rate of error, proved by their divergence alone, and treating them as infallible where they agree, were continued in later years, it would make the erroneous or corrupt part one-half of the whole after 1136 years, or at the end of the 12th century. But if they are further in error only once in ten times, where they are jointly opposed to the Received Text, then a MS. of the date A. D. 1020 would cease to have any weight as evidence, and would contain as many corrupted or altered clauses as those which were still a faithful copy of the original text. Thus all MSS. after the close of the tenth century would be almost wholly useless as evidence for determining the original text. And thus the price which must be paid for the excessive value which modern critics have placed on these two earliest MSS. is the destruction of our faith in the power of writing to transmit any revelation in a trustworthy form beyond the limit of nine and a half centuries, or less than a thousand years. But such a conclusion is wholly unnatural and incredible.

91. The notion, then, of any exceptional merit in these two MSS. above their contemporaries can only be maintained by a general degradation of the MSS. of that age below those of an earlier or a later date. In fact, the phenomena they present agree with the conclusion we have deduced from other facts, that A. D. 300 answers to a decline of purity, never exceeded till we descend as low as the middle of the eighth century. It follows that their

weight as evidence is slightly less, instead of vastly greater, than that of the later uncials, and surpasses that of an average MS. of the 12th century only in about the proportion of four to three.

92. All those alterations, then, of the Received Text, which have been based on the erroneous assumption that each of these two MSS. is equal in evidential value to fifty or a hundred cursive MSS., I agree with Dean Burgon and Mr MacClellan, must be renounced and reversed, whenever the Text of the New Testament comes to be settled on clear and definite principles with regard to the just estimation of the weight of manuscript evidence.