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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE SINAITIC PALIMPSEST OF THE SYRIAC
GOSPELS.

AMONG the many events which have made this generation memorable in the history of mankind, will certainly be reckoned, hereafter, the rich and unexpected discoveries which have thrown such a flood of light upon the origins and the true character of our sacred literature, both Jewish and Christian. The monuments and inscriptions of various ancient races, and especially of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, have furnished us with information unattainable during many silent centuries. Palestine exploration has been rewarded with results which have added new and undreamed of precision to Scripture archæology and geography. In such remarkable "finds" as the Moabite Stone, the Siloam Inscription, and the inscription on the *Chêl* forbidding any Gentile, on pain of death, to set foot within the most sacred precincts of the Temple, we have records which may have been actually seen by the eyes of King Jehoshaphat, of King Hezekiah, and of our Lord and His Apostles. As regards the Old Testament, since it has been subjected to the combined microscope and spectrum analysis of historic and linguistic criticism, we make a perfectly sober statement when we say that we are, in all probability, better acquainted with the structure and characteristics of the ancient Jewish literature—not only than any of the greatest Jewish Rabbis, not only than Hillel or Aquiba—but even than Esra himself and his successors in the rather shadowy "Great Synagogue," living as they did at an epoch when tradition had already become dim and defective, and

when the science of criticism was absolutely unknown. But we have also made an immense advance in our knowledge of early Christianity, and we may entertain the hope that documents may yet come to light which will solve many an uncertain problem, and enable us to understand much which is at present dark and dubious. It was only in 1883 that Archbishop Bryennios published the precious manuscript of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, which will be henceforth indispensable for the history of Christian thought and practice at the close of the first century. Then we had Mr. J. Rendel Harris's publication, in 1891, of the Apology of Aristides, which he had found in 1889. Next came the recent publication of the newly-found Akhmim fragment of the Apocryphal Gospel and Apocalypse of St. Peter, which have been edited by Prof. Swete, and were discovered by the French Archæological Mission in Egypt. Thus a grave at Akhmim, on the east of the Nile, yielded us a document which, though apocryphal and Docetic—perhaps Valentinian—in its characteristics, is full of interest, and “has a note of comparative simplicity and sobriety, which is wanting in apocryphal writings of a later date.” Previous to this, in 1881, we had the recovery of the commentary by Ephraem Syrus on Tatian's *Diatessaron*, of which an edition was published in 1882 by Professor Zahn. It was of surpassing interest and importance, because of its early date. Ephraem the Syrian died A.D. 378, and in the Church of Edessa the *Diatessaron* was actually regarded as Scripture, and was preferred, in many parts of the Syrian Church, to the Gospels themselves, while there prevailed “only a sporadic, and in every sense imperfect knowledge of the original Greek Gospels.” Already, in 1869, had been published in England *The Homilies of Aphraates*, written about A.D. 340, which Dr. Zahn also proved to be based on the same Harmony of Tatian. Now Tatian was an Assyrian, and was stigmatised

as a heretic; but the practical recovery of his *Diatessaron* convincingly proves the most important fact that, as early as A.D. 172, "*The Gospel of St. John was not only recognised, but made the chronological framework of a Harmony by a disciple of Justin Martyr.*"¹

And now we have this newly-found Sinaitic Codex of the four Gospels in Syriac, which, from its antiquity and history, must always have high importance in all questions of the textual criticism of the Gospels. The readers of the EXPOSITOR will naturally wish first (1) to know something about it; and (2) to be informed whether its discovery will tend in any way (as some too rashly suppose) to shake the fundamental beliefs of Christians respecting the being and work of Christ.

I.

Under the first head I propose merely to give some information as to (1) how it was found; (2) in what relations, so far as it has yet been examined by a few competent English scholars, it is believed to stand to other texts and manuscripts; and (3) as to some of its more interesting readings.

i. The happy discoverer of the codex was a lady, Mrs. Lewis, widow of the late Rev. S. S. Lewis, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The interesting story of the find has been published from the diaries of Mrs. Lewis by her twin sister, Mrs. Gibson.²

It is briefly as follows:—

In 1892 three persons, Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Gibson, and Father (afterwards Abbot) Galaktéon, then the monk-librarian of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, were standing in a small dark room in the monastery; and

¹ See articles on Dr. Zahn's edition of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, by Dr. Wace, EXPOSITOR, second series, vol. iv., pp. 161 ff., 294 ff. (1882).

² *How the Codex was Found*, 1893 (Macmillan & Co.).

there Mrs. Lewis—who alone of the three knew Syriac—discovered the precious MS.

Two years previously, Mr. J. Rendel Harris had discovered in the same library the MS. of the Apology of Aristides. It was he who told Mrs. Lewis that among the Estrangelo MSS. in the convent library, some further discovery of value might be made; and, in view of this possibility, he taught her the art of photographing MSS., lent her his own camera, and devised a MS. stand which would save her from fatigue. Mrs. Lewis and her sister had previously studied ancient and modern Greek, and their way was paved for them by their reputation as Philhellenes, and by friendships which they had formed with dignitaries of the Greek Church. Mrs. Lewis had also studied Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac, and Mr. F. C. Burkitt had taught her how to copy the ancient Estrangelo alphabet. Thus equipped, and armed with a letter from the Metropolitan of Libya to the Archbishop of Mount Sinai, together with a letter to the monks, written by the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, the ladies made their way to Mount Sinai, and on February 8th, 1892, worked for seven hours in the library. The most ancient Syriac MSS. are kept, not in the main library, but “in a little room half-way up a dark stair, and partly in a dark closet, approached through a room almost as dark, where they repose in two closed boxes and cannot be seen without a lighted candle.” The monks, absorbed in their eight daily and nightly liturgies, are for the most part profoundly ignorant.¹ They have stored their MSS. at times in vaults, and knowing nothing of their preciousness, have allowed them to suffer from damp and

¹ Mrs. Lewis says that for 15 centuries “prayers have risen from this monastery night and day, the liturgy and the Sacraments having been continually repeated. But as for being a centre of light to the populations around, it might as well never have existed. This seems to me to be the inevitable tendency of attention to a ceremonial worship which leaves neither time nor energy for the instruction of the multitude.” (p. 55.)

decay. It is much to be feared that they have wilfully destroyed some out of sheer ignorance, and every one knows the accident which enabled Tischendorf to save the famous Uncial \aleph from being used to light fires. The two ladies, with indefatigable diligence, and braving many hardships, succeeded, among their other labours, in photographing a Syrian palimpsest of 358 pages, "into which," says Mrs. Lewis, "no eyes but our own had for centuries looked." Its leaves were mostly glued together; they crumbled at a touch, and had to be sometimes held over the steam of a kettle. The upper writing of the palimpsest is probably A.D. 778, and is a Hagiography of female saints. The underwriting, which is centuries earlier, is mainly a copy in red ink of the four Gospels in Syriac.

The sisters took back to Cambridge their priceless photographs, though with no conception of their value, and developed them at leisure.

One day in July they entrusted some of the photographs to Mr. F. C. Burkitt, who, with intense interest, took them to Prof. Bensly, and they discovered the palimpsest to be a variant copy of the fragmentary Syriac version found in 1847 by Canon Cureton among the Nitrian MSS. brought home by Archdeacon Tattam in 1833.

The next day Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Burkitt, and Prof. and Mrs. Bensly decided that they would, as soon as possible, go to Sinai and transcribe the entire MS., and they were accompanied by Mr. Rendel Harris.

On February 8th, 1893 they reached the monastery. Galaktéon, then Hegoumenos or Abbot, gave them every facility, and the little party faced their heroic task. In many places the under-writing of the palimpsest had faded, but became decipherable after the use of a strong composition for reviving ancient writing which Mrs. Lewis had brought from the British Museum. The result of their labours was that they brought home with them a trans-

cription of all that is decipherable of the complete text of this Syriac version of "the separated Gospels."

The text would have been edited by Prof. Bensly, but alas! that scholar, who was as modest as he was learned, came home only to die. He caught a chill at Rome on his homeward journey which proved quickly fatal; but his last hours must have been consoled by the thought of one more service rendered to the cause of Biblical criticism.

2. To the two other scholars, Mr. J. Rendel Harris and Mr. F. C. Burkitt, who accompanied Mrs. Lewis and Prof. Bensly on this journey, we owe some account of the critical position occupied by the MS. and of the peculiar readings which it contains.¹

Up to the time when this new Codex was brought to light there were two ancient Syriac versions of the Gospels—the Curetonian and the Peshittâ.² Further, there was the Syriac Diatessaron. Professor Zahn, after elaborate comparison of these texts, came to the conclusion that the Curetonian was the oldest, the Peshittâ next, and that the Diatessaron presented a text intimately related to the Curetonian, but varied in accordance with Tatian's knowledge of an ancient Greek text, akin to the *Itala*, which he probably took with him from Rome to Mesopotamia. This is also the view of Dr. Nestle (*Allgem. Zeitung*, Nov. 20).

Zahn's conclusion that the Curetonian version ("Cur.") of "the separated Gospels" (called by Dr. Hort "*Syr. vt.*") was really older than the Peshittâ may now be regarded as proved. For if there was any uncertainty as to the source of the quotations in Ephraem Syrus, it was certain that in the *Homilies of Aphraates* (published by Wright in 1869), and in the *Acts of Judas Thomas* (published in 1881), and in Moesinger's Latin version of the Armenian version of

¹ Unhappily the colophon which would have told us the date of the MS. and the place of its transcription is illegible.

² The Philoxenian version is not earlier than A.D. 508.

Ephraem's lost Syriac commentary on the Diatessaron, the text used was allied to *Cur.* rather than to the Peshittâ. It has now become clear that *Syr. vt.* is older than the Diatessaron.¹ The arguments urged against this conclusion by Baethgen (*Evangeliensfragmente*, 1881) break down before the fact that the new codex (*Sin.*) contains readings which diametrically oppose the Encratite prejudices of Tatian, by insisting on the actual marriage of Joseph and Mary. It is also clear from the *omissions* in *Sin.* Tatian had the unauthentic, though canonical conclusion of St. Mark; but *Sin.* concludes decisively at Mark xvi. 8, and also omits the bloody sweat (Luke xxii. 43, 44), and the prayer, "Father, forgive them" (Luke xxiii. 34), both of which passages were in the Diatessaron. Also there is in *Sin.* a very curious mistranslation in Luke iv. 29, "so as to hang him," for "to throw him down," arising from the translator's confusion of *κατακρημνίσαι* with *κρεμάσαι*. This mistranslation of *Sin.* would have been impossible if the scribe had the Diatessaron lying before him. Mr. Burkitt therefore seems entitled to the conclusion that the *Syr. vt.* is the oldest known Syriac text.

These conclusions, then, may be regarded as certain :

i. In this Syriac palimpsest we have a *manuscript* which from its style of writing, its absence of diacritic points, and other peculiarities, is believed by experts to be certainly not later than the beginning of the fifth century, and possibly half a century earlier.

ii. This manuscript preserves a *text*, which is *the oldest Syriac text* hitherto known; preserves it in a form far more complete than the Curetonian (for only four hundred and

¹ The facts here mentioned are derived from a very learned paper on the Sinai Palimpsest by Mr. F. C. Burkitt, in the *Guardian* of October 31. Westcott and Hort (Introduction, p. 118) have pointed out that the *Peshittâ* (or "Simple") version was a sort of Syriac Vulgate, which had undergone revision in conformity with Greek MSS., and that this surmise was verified by *Cur.* The revision probably took place near the beginning of the fourth century.

fifty verses are missing, and a few parts illegible); and represents the form of the Gospels in Syriac *not later than* A.D. 150.

iii. It is most important to establish the relation of this old Syriac text to the oldest Greek and Latin texts. Now our oldest and most valuable Uncial MSS. are \aleph (Tischendorf's Sinaitic MS.); and B, the Vatican MS. Very high importance is rightly given to these venerable Uncials in the Westcott and Hort's standard critical edition of the text, and with these Uncials *Sin.* constantly agrees. The critical value of the new palimpsest (*Sin.*) is immensely enhanced if it can be shown to be *independent* of \aleph B; and a reading contained in \aleph B receives very strong additional support if it is contained in *Sin.* as an independent authority for the oldest text, since *Sin.* represents "a text superior in antiquity to anything yet known." This independence of *Sin.* of the text found in \aleph B can only be proved if it be found that *Sin.* diverges from them where they appear to be wrong. Now Mr. Burkitt states that out of ninety-five instances in which the readings of \aleph B are rejected, and relegated to the margin by Westcott and Hort, *Sin.* is legible in eighty-two, and only coincides with \aleph B in twenty-three of these; and "in all but two of these readings the combination of \aleph B *Sin.* is supported by the whole mass of authorities, except D *latt.*" It is obvious then that when *Sin.* agrees with \aleph B, it adds immense weight to the probability that they present the truest reading.

iv. As regards its relation to D and old Latin versions, Mr. Burkitt says that *Sin.* may be described as "a western text without western interpolations." As regards *mixed* texts, it had been already observed that the old Syriac is connected with a peculiar element in the Ferrar group of MSS., so much so that some suspected these cursive MSS. to have been retranslated from a Syriac text; but Mr. Burkitt points out a very peculiar reading, "shall eat

breakfast" (ἄριστον) for "shall eat bread" (ἄρτον), in Luke xiv. 15, which is found in *Sin.* and *Cur.*, and also found in the Ferrar group, though it is obviously a Greek and not a Syriac variant.¹

v. Mr. J. Rendel Harris, the collaborateur of Mr. Burkitt, in an interesting and valuable paper in the *Contemporary Review* for November, gives a rough diagram to express the general position of this newly-recovered text. He thinks that from the primitive text originated *two* sets of MSS.—one, which comprises the large majority, is orthodox; the other was unorthodox. From the *unorthodox* text came a series of *secondary* orthodox readings, and also the unorthodox *Sin.* From the *secondary* orthodox text were derived the Diatessaron and the Curetonian, and in a more direct line the Græco-Latin and old Latin texts, and the Ferrar group.

3. We now come to some of the more interesting peculiarities of the new text, of which Mr. J. Rendel Harris and Mr. Burkitt have given us a glimpse.² The most interesting points, omitting for the present one of capital importance of which I must speak separately, are as follows:—

OMISSIONS.

1. Every one knows how overwhelming is the *textual* taken in connection with the *critical* evidence against the genuineness of the verses Mark xvi. 9–20, which are omitted in **N B**, and in "accurate copies" mentioned by Eusebius, and abound in peculiarities. The evidence of **N B** is immensely strengthened by the conclusion of *Sin.* at v. 8, which is immediately followed in the palimpsest by Luke i. 1, after the words, "the Gospel of Mark is ended."

2. The Lord's Prayer in St. Luke xi. 2–4 occurs in the shortest form. ("Our *daily* bread" is rendered "our *constant* bread," as in *Cur.*)

3. *Sin.* agrees with **N B** and *Cur.* in omitting Matt. xii.

¹ Mrs. Lewis renders it "meat."

² Mrs. Lewis's translation only came to hand after I had revised the first proof.

47. "Then one said unto Him, Behold Thy mother and Thy brethren," etc.

4. Matt. xvi. 2, 3. "The red and the lowering sky."

5. Matt. xvii. 21. "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Perhaps an ascetic gloss.)

6. Matt. xviii. 11. "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

7. Matt. xxiii. 11. The Scribes and Pharisees shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men, etc.

8. Matt. xxiv. 36. Omit "neither the Son."

9. Mark ix. 44, 46. "Where their worm dieth not," etc.

10. Mark xv. 28. "And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, 'He was numbered with the transgressors.'"

Luke xix. 25. "And they said unto Him, Lord, he hath ten pounds."

11. Luke xxii. 43, 44. The bloody sweat.

Luke xxiii. 10-13. The reconciliation of Herod and Pilate.

12. Luke xxiii. 34. "Father, forgive them, etc."

13. The story of the adulteress (John vii. 53, viii. 11).

14. Matt. xix. 29, Mark x. 29, omit "wife."

Any reader, who has even the most superficial acquaintance with textual criticism, will recognise, without further comment, the importance of some of the omissions, and the curious interest of others. Generally speaking, we have (as in the case of the genuine Ignatian letters), as Mr. Harris says, "a substantially shorter text than the majority of the extant documents." There is "an almost entire absence of such passages as are generally held to be interpolations."

PECULIAR READINGS.

1. Matt. xxi. 31. "The last" (instead of "the first").

2. Matt. x. 23. (Add) "and if they persecute you in the other, flee ye into yet another" (with D).

3. Matt. xiii. 48. "They gathered the good (*καλά*) as good" (perhaps reading *ὡς ἀγαθὰ* for *εἰς ἀγγεῖα*). (Mrs. Lewis has "The very good fishes.")

4. John iii. 6. "For God is a living spirit."
 5. Matt. xxvii. 16, 17. "Jesus Barabbas."
 6. Mark vi. 8. "Take nothing save a staff."
Mark x. 40. "Is not mine to give, but it is prepared for another" (or "others").
 7. Mark x. 50. "Putting on" (*ἐπιβαλὼν*) for "casting away" (*ἀποβαλὼν*).
 8. Luke ii. 6. "To be taxed with *Mary his wife*" (not "his espoused.")
 9. Luke ii. 14. "Good will towards men," for *ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας* of \aleph A B D.
 10. Luke iii. 23. "Jesus, *as He was called*, the Son of Joseph." (So Mrs. Lewis, p. 103.)
 11. Luke iv. 44. "Of Judea," with \aleph B C L, etc., for "of Galilee."
 12. Luke ii. 4. "For *they were both* of the house of David."
 13. Luke xxiii. 37. The crown of thorns put on the head of Christ on the cross.
 14. Luke xxiv. 51. "He was lifted up from them."
 15. John i. 34. "I saw and bare record that this is *the chosen* of God."
 16. John viii. 37. And hath Abraham seen thee?"
 17. John xi. Martha asks, "Why are they taking away the stone?"
 18. Luke xxii. 17. "Take this and divide it among yourselves. This is my blood, the new covenant."
 19. Luke xxiii. 48. "And they said, Woe to us, what hath befallen us? Woe to us because of our sins!"
- Among other peculiarities we may mention that Jesus is often called *Mâran*, "our Lord." In Luke ii. 25 we are told that Simeon "was receiving the supplication of Israel," and in ii. 36 that Anna had only lived seven days with a husband, and had been a widow eighty-four years.¹

¹ In Luke xii. 47 we have "shall swallow many stripes," which Mrs. Lewis compares to the Egyptian "eating stick."

II.

But we now come to another aspect of the importance of the MS., and one which has already excited great and painful attention. It is that the palimpsest contains variations of a distinctly unorthodox character, apparently introduced, at whatever period, into the Syriac text, for the express purpose of implying that Jesus was the Son of Joseph, and either not born in a supernatural manner, or only so in a secondary and almost metaphorical sense.

That this is the intention of the variations in Matt. i. 18-25 there can be, unhappily, no manner of doubt. This will be seen at once from the readings which we print in italics in Matt. i. 16, 21.

Thus in Matt. i. 16 we read with a start of pain and surprise: "Jacob begat Joseph; *Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus*, who is called Christ";¹ and in Matt. i. 21, "For she shall bear *thee* a son"; and in Matt. i. 25, "And he married his wife, and she bare *him* a son, and he called His name Jesus." Here it will be observed that not only is "him" added to assert the paternity of Joseph, but that the words "*knew her not until,*" are significantly omitted.

Now already this reading has led to the publication of two papers in the *Academy* (November 17th), by Mr. F. C. Conybeare and Mr. F. P. Badham, in which they advocate views which are suggested by these readings, but are at variance with the doctrine of the Catholic Church since the days of the Apostles. It is needless to say that such views—and we are destined to have many more of them—will not be knocked down by mere fierce blows from the mace of authority; and it would be equally needless for me to say that I do not wish, even for a moment, to use against them the base *argumentum ad invidiam*. The days of the

¹ Mrs. Gibson, in a letter to the *Times* (November 2, 1894), suggests an error of transcription or translation, but I am informed on high authority that the view is untenable.

Inquisition — with its horribly execrable atrocities, and deadly crimes against the indefeasible rights of the human race—are over: at least one used to hope so. The world will have sunk into a very abyss of degradation if it ever allows the re-imposition of bondage by tyrannous and usurping priests upon the neck of freed humanity. Members of the Reformed Churches, at any rate, have long returned to the great principles of the earliest Greek and Latin fathers, before the sacerdotalism of Cyprian and the intolerance of Augustine. They hold that *Βία ἐχθρὸν Θεῶν*, and “*religionis non est cogere religionem.*” Views which we regard as errors or as heresies must be met, and can only be effectually met, by calm and incontrovertible reasoning, not by the swash-buckler denunciations in which ecclesiastical orthodoxy usually delights, because it cannot any longer resort to the desperate sincerity of fagot and stake, as it did in days of Papal supremacy, and may do again if priests get the upper hand. Mr. Badham and Mr. Conybeare are scholars and men of learning; and if their views are to be refuted, it can only be by serious arguments, not by contemptuous anathemas. Some may be eager to regard the new readings as genuine because they are unorthodox; we should only be following a bad and unscientific example, if, for the same reason, we refused to examine them.

Mr. Conybeare sees, and fully admits, that the naturalistic account of the birth of Jesus in Matt. i. 16, 21, 25, is found side by side with the miraculous account; but he argues (if I interpret him rightly) that the text was *originally* and *primitively* “unorthodox”; that this original text is correctly restored by *Sin.* in these three verses, and that the consistently miraculous text of our all-but unanimous authorities is, in reality, a text which has been tampered with for orthodox purposes.

He argues—and surely the arguments are far too slender to bear so vast a superincumbent weight—that,—

i. The genealogy of *Joseph* would have been meaningless on the "orthodox" hypothesis, since "all parties will admit" that "it was originally devised on heretical lines and destined to prove that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph."

Surely "*all parties*" are very far indeed from making any such admission. Before the eyes of the Jews, Jesus was, for all civic and social purposes, regarded as the son of Joseph (Luke ii. 43, 48, etc.). Mary, we are expressly told, had "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart"; she had not revealed to the Nazarenes—not even to "the Lord's brethren"—the awful and stupendous secret which lay far too deep for words, and which could not but vindicate itself in God's due time. It was the will of God that only by slow degrees of enlightenment should the truth dawn even on the mind of Christ's most chosen Apostles, that He was not only "the Son of David," but in the highest sense "the Son of God." It may be, and probably is true, that Mary and Joseph were near of kin, and that Christ's Davidic descent (as is expressly stated by *Sin.* in Luke ii. 4) was derived from the Virgin as well as, for civic and public purposes, from Joseph. But for those to whom the supernatural birth had not yet been made known, the Davidic genealogy of Joseph was necessary, and it was a matter of historic interest to all.

ii. Mr. Conybeare is quite right in saying that the genealogy of Joseph (which we do not admit to have been heretically devised) "cannot be detached from the text as a later addition"; and on that we need not dwell. He, however, attaches to the phrase "the *generation* of Jesus Christ," in Matt. i. 18, a significance which it does not bear more necessarily than in Gen. ii. 4, where the word is applied to the *creation* of the heavens and the earth.

iii. It is true that the words "*and he knew her not until,*" are also omitted in a *single* cursive MS., namely *k*, a cursive of the African Latin version.¹ But though the

¹ For the general reader I may mention that *k* in a cursive MS. (known as

value of *k* is high, it is much to say that the consensus of *Sin.* and *k*—a MS. of a Syriac translation, and of a Latin translation—are at all sufficient to prove “a widely diffused and *established* text” against the overpowering consensus in the opposite direction of all the other versions, all the other uncials, and all the other cursives.

iv. Mr. Conybeare thinks that a heretic could not possibly have been content with such slight changes as we find in *Sin.*; that he would have made, at least, a clean sweep of Matt. i. 19 (“Now Joseph, *her husband* (not in *Cur.*), because he was just, did not wish to expose Mary, and thought of quietly divorcing her”), which entirely stultifies the notion of his paternity. “We should have to reduce the infancy section to shreds,” says Mr. Harris, “before it would satisfy an Adoptionist hypothesis.”¹

On this point I do not *at all* admit Mr. Conybeare’s argument. An unorthodox scribe might easily venture on tiny, and almost surreptitious, tamperings with the text, when it might have been (and probably was) absolutely impossible for him to gratify his dogmatic prejudices by wholesale omissions and insertions. By way of instance, the ascetic bias which tampered with the text by inserting “fasting” in Matt. xvii. 21, Mark ix. 29, 1 Cor. vii. 5, Acts x. 30, did not, for a moment, venture to excise passages which told so powerfully against its cherished principles as Matt. ix. 14, 15; Mark ii. 18, 19; Luke v. 33; Col. ii. 21–23.

To me, then, it seems that Mr. Conybeare’s arguments in

the *Codex Taurinensis* or *Bobbiensis*) of the 4th or 5th century, brought from Bobbio to Turin, highly valued by Tischendorf, and pronounced by Tregelles to have been “amended from a Greek text more Alexandrian than that which had been the original basis of the Latin version.” It has been edited by Bishop Wordsworth and Mr. White.

¹ As Mr. Harris says, *Cur.* “is of the nature of an orthodox revision.” His quotations from St. Chrysostom prove that “the language in the infancy section in Matthew was a fertile ground of misunderstanding, and that its text was at a very early period encumbered with various readings.”

favour of an original, unorthodox, or only semi-orthodox, text, are quite untenable. They break down (i.) under the vast agreement of numberless MSS. of all schools and origins—*Cur.*, the Ferrar group, the Armenian version, old Latin, and Greek—which militate against these naturalistic readings of *Sin.* Even *Cur.* has the orthodox reading in Matt. i. 16, and an orthodox one in i. 25. (ii.) They militate against the unquestioned belief of the Apostles (through the Epistles, and Apocalypse *passim*); (iii.) against the whole Gospel of St. John; (iv.) against the unvarying belief from the earliest times of the universal Church; and (v.) against the involuntary and inevitable retention, even in *Sin.*, of entire passages which make the heretical variation entirely meaningless. *Sin.*, in this matter, contradicts itself. All that it proves is—and that we already knew from Christian history—that “there was unorthodoxy near the source.”

v. Mr. Conybeare thinks that he has accounted for the anomalies of the text by arguing that “the Jews, in the time of Christ, deemed it possible and natural for a child to be conceived of the Holy Spirit, and yet at the same time to be begotten in the ordinary way.” His knowledge of Philo enables him to adduce interesting evidence that this was the case; but, on the one hand, he presses too literally the vague and abstract mysticism of Philo; and in the second place, there is nothing new in such a view. It applied, if at all, to every child alike. It is, indeed, simply the view of the “Creationists” as opposed to that of the “Traducianists,” and something very like it is involved even in such lines as Wordsworth’s:

“Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who s our home”;

and Tennyson’s:

“A soul shall draw from out the vast,
And strike its being into bounds”;

not to mention the fact that the notion occurs quite com-

monly in ordinary parlance. This Philonian view, then, throws no light whatever on the assumption that the birth of Christ was by ordinary law, and it either reduces great parts of Matt. i. 18-25, and the whole infancy narrative of St. Luke, and the whole Gospel of St. John (not to add the greater part of the whole New Testament), to self-contradiction and chaos; but even then it leaves us with *another* miracle instead of the belief of the Catholic Church. Considering the fact that every birth is a practically insoluble miracle,—considering the ancient question, “Canst thou tell how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child?”—considering that the belief in a naturalistic birth was undoubtedly found in early days among a few heretics, so that any scribe with such views might be tempted to pervert the text,—the attempt to modify the belief of Christendom by these new hypotheses, and by such scantily supported traces of textual divergence, has not the least force. It would have been much more natural for a belief of a purely supernatural birth to have grown out of the story of John the Baptist, which exactly resembles that of Isaac, of which Philo speaks directly (comp. Gal. iv. 29). Yet there never was such a suggestion.

vi. In Matt. i. 16 *Sin.* gives us “Joseph, to whom was betrothed *Mary the Virgin*, begat Jesus.” Here, even in the heretical alteration of the text, we find the emphatic title “*Mary the Virgin*.” Will Mr. Conybeare find even a single follower in the attempt to persuade us that the title, “the Virgin,” was thus *par excellence* given to Mary because she remained a widow after her husband’s death? Every one knows the view, that in the second century widows were, in a very secondary sense, classed with “the virgins,” but only as an organised body.¹ But not only is

¹ See *Ignat. ad Smyrn.*, 13 τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας. But the title, “widow,” was *higher* than the title “virgin,” as appears from Tert., *De Virg. Vel.*, 9. The Virgin could not possibly have been called a *Virgia* because she

there no proof whatever that any such custom prevailed in the days of the *Apostles*, but (so far as I know) it has never occurred to any one before Mr. Conybeare, for more than eighteen centuries, to appeal to this custom as an explanation of the title "the Virgin Mary." Moreover, we are told that in Syriac "the word Virgin is always used in its strict sense."

vii. Much that I have said of Mr. Conybeare's paper applies also to Mr. Badham's (*Academy*, Nov. 17). The only new suggestion is that the apparent discrepancies (as he regards them) in the actually orthodox and assumed heretical text of the Gospels may be accounted for partly by considerations analogous to those urged by Mr. Conybeare, and partly by the suggestion—if I rightly catch the drift of his arguments—that a child may have been born to *Joseph and Mary* without either of these being conscious of the fact! If that be his meaning, it is difficult to conceive that any one could accept this wildly original version of the Virgin Birth of Christ, in lieu of that which has prevailed since the earliest dawn of Christianity and by reason of which St. Luke says of Christ—not in any secondary or Philonian sense, but in the only sense which accords with his own and the other Gospels and the rest of the New Testament—that He was "the Son of God."

Into the purely theological aspects of the great unshaken doctrine of the Incarnation in Christ's Virgin Birth, and into the defeated and rapidly extinguished heresies by which it was impugned, I have left myself no space to enter. I trust that they will be treated by abler intellects than mine.

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[P.S.—Since this paper was in print I have read the was a pure unmarried widow. See Lightfoot's *Apostolic Fathers*, I. 1-385, II. 323. Mr. Simcox, in a paper in the *Academy* (Nov. 24, 1894), which I only saw when my paper was finished, thinks that the text of Ignatius may have been tampered with.

learned article of the Rev. R. H. Charles (*Academy*, December 1). He argues that the heretical reading is what we should expect to find in a genealogy of Joseph, which he regards as an Ebionitic addition to the primitive text. This he thinks is shown (i.) by its absence from Justin Martyr (*Ap.*, i. 33); but Justin Martyr evidently knew of it (*Dial. c. Tryph.*, 120); (ii.) from Tatian's *Diatessaron* (ii. 1-8); and (iii.) from the fact that Irish and other Latin MSS. place the initial letter of the Gospel *not at verse 1. but at verse 18.* As to the text of *Sin.* he says that in *k* at Matt. i. 16 there is a *lacuna* after the word *Virgo* and before *Maria*, which was not originally filled up as it now is in *b* (the fourth century Cod. Veronensis); viz. "et Jacob genuit Josef, cui desponsata erat virgo [*Maria Virgo autem Maria*] genuit Jesum." *Genuit*, however, normally means paternity not maternity, and is altered into *peperit* by *d* (the sixth century Cod. Cantabrigiensis). He infers that *Sin.* represents the primitive text, that this text is necessarily implied in *Cur.* and the old Latin and Armenian version; and that therefore Matt. i. 1-17 is the wrong addition of a scribe. He also doubts the genuineness of the genealogy in Luke. It would require a separate paper to enter into this view, but it is interesting, and deserves full consideration. On the other hand Mr. White suggests that the omission of "knew her not until" in *k*, and the omission of *accipere* in i. 20 are due to a desire to insinuate the *ἀειπαρθενία* of Mary.]