LANGUAGE AND TEXT IN THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

BY

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A

Two matters engage the student of the New Testament from time to time: text and language. In the Gospels and Acts we have considerable variations in text which reach an extreme in Acts in the differences between the text of D with its allies on the one hand and most other witnesses including the Alexandrian and Syrian on the other. In the same books the Greek shows distinctive features in particular strong traces of Semitic idiom. Professor M. Black and his pupil, Dr. M. Wilcox, study the Semitic features of the language in the conviction that the problems of text and language are related. Professor E. J. Epp examines aspects of the text in the light not of linguistic but of theological considerations.

B

Professor Black’s book first appeared in 1946 and a second edition with an additional appendix and some thirty-four pages of supplementary notes was issued in 1954. In the third edition the supplementary notes and other material have been worked into the text and an appendix by Dr. G. Vermes has been added on The Son of Man. In all the size of the book has been increased by some fifty-five pages.

The book now contains the following elements: Part I, The Approach, has these chapters, (1) Previous Work on the Aramaic of the Gospels and

The new discoveries mentioned in the book make it clear that the study of the Aramaic background of our books is on the move. Dr. Black is more concerned to report new discoveries in the later forms of Palestinian Aramaic but he does give some attention to the Aramaic material from Qumran. Those who wish to learn more of the Qumran texts can do so from Professor Fitzmyer's review of this edition of Dr. Black's book. Dr. Fitzmyer gladly recognises how much we are indebted to the book, even though he is a little critical of the final revision. For more than twenty years it has served as a guide to those puzzled by theories of an Aramaic, or more generally a Semitic, background to the Gospels and Acts.

It is one of Dr. Black's merits that he recognised the close connexion between language and text, for example at pp. 28-34, 277-80. It had been seen long ago by scholars like Wellhausen that D sometimes has a reading that reflects Semitic idiom more exactly than the reading of other witnesses. Dr. Black has collected many examples of this: casus pendens 53, asyndeton 58 f., parataxis 68 f., indefinite forms 105 f., 107. He has also noticed examples of Semitic idiom in readings of Χ and Θ. If he has not ranged more widely, he is not alone in this.

C. H. Turner in his day proceeded similarly. He was not convinced by the arguments of Hort that D and the Old Latin were as worthless as Hort made out. He took a number of features in the language and showed that in a number of places D and its allies had retained these features but other witnesses had lost them. He extended this procedure to some readings of W and Θ, but he did not consistently examine all the readings of Mark in this way. The evidence of A, the Syrian witnesses and the Textus Receptus, for example, he largely ignored. Let us take some concrete examples. At Mk.ix,12,38, x.20,29, xii.24, xiv.29 ἕφη and ἀποκριθείσα

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