

## QUEEN ANNE RESURRECTED? A REVIEW ARTICLE

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"The Textus Receptus is as dead as Queen Anne," A. T. Robertson used to say.<sup>1</sup> But if that judgment is accurate, Queen Anne must be experiencing something of a resurrection. Certainly there is a revival of interest in the Greek Textus Receptus (TR) today, and at just such a time as most scholars were convinced of its "death" and "burial." But the ghost has arisen! This, at least, is the indication one gets from Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville/New York: Nelson, 1977). This modern defense of the TR takes up where John William Burgon left off and argues that in accepting the Westcott-Hort text and the textual theory it presupposes, NT scholars made a serious mistake that has hampered NT study for almost a century. True progress can be made, Pickering feels, only when scholarship returns to the "majority" Greek text as (usually) represented by the printed TR. Other recent writers have also called for a return to the TR; one thinks immediately of Edward F. Hills, Zane C. Hodges (who wrote the foreword to Pickering's book), T. H. Brown, D. A. Waite, J. J. Ray and David Otis Fuller. But Pickering's work is likely to find greater appeal than the writings of any of these. It is an attractive volume, for the most part well-written and carefully documented, and it has a publisher with an extensive marketing outlet.

There are certain premises of the book that are well taken. For example, a large part of the book consists of a presentation (pp. 31-40) and critical evaluation (pp. 41-92) of the mainstays of the Westcott-Hort textual theory. Such criticism of weaknesses in a foundational work is not only necessary but welcome. But Pickering adds little here that is new. NT scholars have long been aware of the inadequacies of the Westcott-Hort terminology, the limitations of the genealogical argument, the speculative nature of Hort's "Lucianic Recension," the somewhat arbitrary make-up of Hort's text-types, and the limited number of clear examples of conflation in the Byzantine text-type. These are areas that have received attention almost from the appearance of the Westcott-Hort text. Surely Pickering does not think that a relisting of these problems argues *ipso facto* for a return to the TR.

Also well taken is Pickering's criticism of the excesses of eclectic methodology, which have played such a prominent role in recent NT textual study. The use of pure eclecticism to the minimization of the testimony of the manuscripts, versions and fathers is a highly subjective and potentially misleading guide to the recovery of the original text. A plea for caution in this area, therefore, is in order. Pickering, how-

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<sup>1</sup>*Studies in the Text of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926) 53, citing C. H. Turner, *The Study of the New Testament*, p. 49.

ever, seems to condemn the approach *in toto*, without making allowance for varying degrees of utilization. I would have liked to have seen a clearer differentiation between a *pure* eclecticism (which often seems simply to ignore the external witnesses) and a *reasoned* eclecticism (which uses internal factors to help account for the manuscript tradition but which emphasizes the witnesses themselves).<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to see conservatives moving more into the area of lower criticism. Pickering's interest in the text stems from a high regard for the authenticity of the NT writings. Hopefully, more theological conservatives will feel inclined to enter what is often an "unglamorous" area of Biblical study.

Certain weaknesses, however, will limit the usefulness of the work. It does not seem to me, for example, that Pickering really perceives the *a priori* force of the genealogical argument. True, he discusses the genealogical argument in detail and (following E. C. Colwell) points out certain problems with it (e. g., exact genealogies for actual manuscripts cannot be worked out, and mixture of readings has confused the picture in the earlier period). But even though we do not have the materials for working out the exact genealogical relationships, they are there. Since manuscripts were copied from predecessors, there is a "parent-child" scheme; we simply lack the historical data to be able to reconstruct it. But the logical force of the genealogical argument, so far as the TR is concerned, remains: The fact that a text has a *majority* of support does not *necessarily* mean that it is correct. It may or may not be, and to defend the TR simply on the basis of majority is inadequate. The genealogical argument, then, is not "useless" (Vaganay), or "a broken reed" (Colwell), or "inapplicable" (Zuntz). Its theoretical usefulness lies in its demonstration of the inadequacy of assuming textual accuracy on the basis of majority of manuscripts and in its demonstration of the possibility of accurate readings being preserved in a minority of manuscripts.

Pickering also complains that Hort treated the text of the NT "just like any other book" and did not adequately allow for the possibility of deliberate scribal alteration in the text. To some extent, this criticism of Hort is probably justified. J. Rendel Harris once remarked that "to Dr. Hort the scribes were all angels, as far as theology was concerned."<sup>3</sup> But if Hort minimized the influence of theological considerations on the NT text, Pickering has surely exaggerated it. Harris' words might appropriately be altered to read that "to Mr. Pickering the scribes were all demons, as far as theology was concerned." Pickering approvingly quotes Colwell as saying that "most variations . . . were made deliberately" (p. 42). Such a statement is puzzling. Most NT textual variations involve accidental errors, such as changing the word order, substitution of one synonym or another, omitting a word or phrase altogether or re-

<sup>2</sup>Cf. G. D. Fee, "Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism—Which?", *Studies in New Testament Language and Text* (ed. J. K. Elliott; Leiden: Brill, 1976) 174-197.

<sup>3</sup>J. R. Harris, *Sidelights on New Testament Research* (London: The Kingsgate Press and James Clarke & Co., 1908) 35.

peating it unnecessarily, etc. There was, no doubt, some alteration of the NT text because of doctrinal considerations (cf. Marcion and Tatian). But these should not be blown out of proportion. Pickering returns to the error of von Soden, who likewise overestimated the extent of doctrinal alterations that could be traced to early errorists.

Pickering also complains that the modern critical texts sometimes follow Codex D in its "omissions," particularly in Luke 24. Pickering says that since D has "an inveterate propensity for omission" (p. 61) it is odd that critics should favor its text. It seems to me that this misunderstands the reasoning of Hort and others with regard to Codex D. Actually, it is because D has "an inveterate propensity" toward *addition* to the text that its omissions become significant. These readings in Luke 24, mysteriously called by Hort "Western Non-Interpolations" (actually they could be considered "Non-Western Interpolations," but perhaps Hort felt that such a designation would reflect on the "Neutral" text), were seriously considered as having claims to originality on the basis of their absence from an early manuscript that normally *added* extraneous material. Pickering's thinking seems somewhat clouded at this point.

Pickering questions Hort's view that the early scribes probably did not exercise great care in searching out the "best" manuscripts for copying. He then marshalls a host of quotations (pp. 94-100) to show that early Christians did regard the NT as authoritative. But this is a *non sequitur* that seems to miss the point of Hort's argument. Early Christians *did* accept the authority of the NT; whether they usually made careful textual comparisons of manuscripts is another question.

Another area of complaint that some will find with Pickering's work concerns its emotionally-loaded language. Since this is a complaint so frequently lodged against Pickering's mentor, John William Burgon, it is odd that Pickering should handicap his views by using a similar approach (though admittedly not to the same extent as Burgon). Examples of undue generalization, loaded terminology, overstatement and/or abrasive language may be seen in the following: Critics follow Westcott-Hort because "the safe thing to do is stay with the party line" (p. 29); "Hort did not arrive at his theory through unprejudiced intercourse with the facts" (p. 32); Hort "deliberately set out to construct a theory that would vindicate his preconceived animosity for the Received Text" (p. 32); Hort did not have "an open mind" (p. 87); Hort's results were "a fabrication" (p. 48); "it is commonplace among the many who are determined to despise the 'Byzantine' text to dodge the issue" (p. 71); some studies are "rigged" against the TR" (p. 73); "Hort's preaching is better than his practice" (p. 78); the Westcott-Hort theory is "erroneous at every point" (p. 91); p66 "lied" to us, and "Aleph is clearly a bigger liar than B" (pp. 125-126); the oldest manuscripts are "habitual liars" and "convicted liars all" (p. 135); Pickering's argument has a "punch line" (p. 134); textual scholars "copy from one another" rather than doing independent research (pp. 62-63).

Other interesting views of Pickering that many will question are: (1) The older manuscripts, far from being the better, are the worst. Picker-

ing says, "Anyone who finds the history of the text presented herein to be convincing will place little confidence in the earliest MSS" (p. 117; cf. pp. 122; 135; 175 n. 10). (2) The traditional text "receives *more support* from the early Church Fathers than does the critical text" (p. 70). What would Hort, who stressed the absence of the Syrian text in the ante-Nicene period, say to that? (3) Pickering accepts José O'Callaghan's identification of 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53, 7Q4 with 1 Tim 3:16; 4:1, 3, and 7Q8 with Jas 1:23-24, and asserts that "7Q5, 4, and 8 tend to confirm the history of the text presented in this volume" (p. 148). Though these papyri identifications are perhaps possible, most scholars have been quite hesitant in following O'Callaghan for lack of sufficient proof. (4) Pickering feels that the lack of early extant manuscripts of the Byzantine family can be explained as the result of devout Christians destroying old worn-out manuscripts once new copies were made. He says he personally has worn out several Bibles through use (p. 123). I would be interested in knowing whether he then piously destroyed these worn-out Bibles or whether they are not still somewhere in his personal library. At any rate, such a systematic destruction of used manuscripts by early Christians as this view demands does not seem to have objective historical corroboration, and I seriously doubt that such a view can account for our lack of early Byzantine manuscripts. (5) Pickering feels that the longer reading, not the shorter, is probably original (pp. 79-83), and the easier reading, not the harder, is more probably original (pp. 83-85). (6) Pickering contends that manuscripts must not only be weighed; they must also be counted (pp. 127-128).

Some minor points also call for mention: (1) Pickering complains that "it is hard to understand why the U. B. S. Text cites [the reading of Codex A at 1 Tim 3:16] for 'who'" (p. 175 n. 30). He feels it should have been cited as reading "God." But the reading of Codex A at this point is uncertain, and some investigators have concluded that its original reading was "God" while others have felt that it was "who." What Pickering does not mention, however, is that the UBS text indicates this uncertainty by inserting "vid" after "A\*." I do not, therefore, understand his complaint at this point. (Although Pickering does not mention it, the Nestle-Aland text does cite A\* as reading "who" without indicating the level of uncertainty. This is unfortunate, but it is the UBS text that Pickering is speaking of, not Nestle-Aland.) (2) The book is inconsistent in the use of the abbreviation "A. D.," sometimes putting it before the numeral, sometimes after. If a future edition of the book is called for, hopefully "A. D." will consistently precede the numerals. (3) Pickering claims that Burgon's work went largely unheeded because Burgon was "misrepresented" (p. 143). Since he acknowledges his indebtedness to Burgon (p. 176 n. 1), as well as to Hodges (p. 174 n. 18), perhaps he fears that he, too, will be misrepresented (cf. p. 143). But I am not convinced that Burgon's crusade for the TR was actually "misrepresented" on any large scale. Burgon did not attract a large following, but that was not because he was "misrepresented" or misunderstood. (4) Mark 1:40 is cited as an example of conflation in Codex B (p. 60), whereas B actually omits the variant in question.

## CONCLUSION

It was once thought that Westcott and Hort "slew" the TR. But if modern developments are any indication, they only "wounded" it at best. The TR, with all its non-Byzantine readings, fabricated Greek, late manuscript attestation, etc., is still very much with us. Pickering's work is an invitation to abandon the results of a century of research and return to an improved TR. The identity of the NT text, in his opinion, is to be sought in the mass of relatively late Greek manuscripts. NT scholarship cannot be blamed if it requires greater evidence than this volume presents before following so radical a course of action.