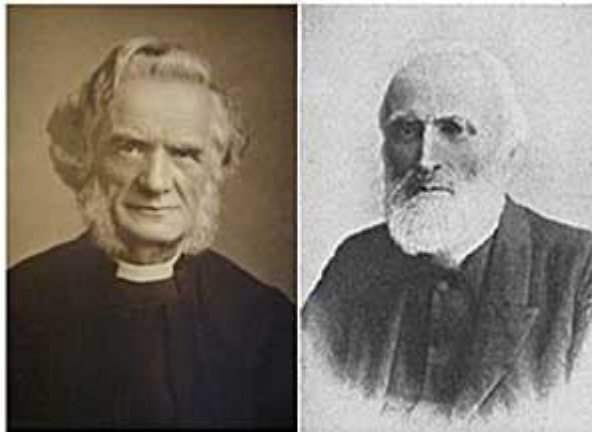


Westcott and Hort: Translator's Beliefs

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Bishop Brooke Foss Westcott & Fenton John Anthony Hort

EARLY HERESIES STILL WITH US TODAY

The Bible warns that there would be those who would corrupt the word of God (2nd Corinthians 2:17) and handle it deceitfully (2nd Corinthians 4:2). There would arise false gospels with false epistles (2nd Thessalonians 2:2), along with false prophets and teachers who would not only bring in damnable heresies but would seek to make merchandise of the true believer through their own feigned words (2nd Peter 2:1-3).

It did not take long for this to occur. In the days of the Apostles, and shortly afterwards, several doctrinal heresies arose. Their early beginnings are referred to in the New Testament in such places as Galatians 1:6-8; 1st John 4:3; 2nd John 1:7; and Jude 1:3-4. They not only plagued the early Church, but are still with us today, in modern form, in many contemporary Christian cults. These false doctrines influenced the transmission of scripture and account for some of the differences in the line of manuscripts.

WESTCOTT AND HORT

Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892) produced a Greek New Testament in 1881 based on the findings of Tischendorf. This Greek NT was the basis for the Revised Version of that same year. They also developed a theory of textual criticism which underlay their Greek NT and several other Greek NT since (such as the Nestle's text and the United Bible Society's text). Greek New Testaments such as these produced the modern English translations of the Bible we have today. So it is important for us to know the theory of Westcott and Hort as well as something of the two men who have so greatly influenced modern textual criticism.

In short, the Westcott and Hort theory states that the Bible is to be treated as any other book would be.

Westcott and Hort believed the Greek text which underlies the KJV was perverse and corrupt. Hort called the Textus Receptus vile and villainous (Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort, Vol. I, p.211).

If Westcott and Hort are the fathers of modern textual criticism and the restorers of the true text, should we not know something of their beliefs to see if they are consistent with Scripture? This would be harmonious with the teaching found in Matthew 7:17.

Here's what Westcott and Hort said about...

The Scriptures:

“I reject the word infallibility of Holy Scriptures overwhelmingly”. (Westcott, *The Life and Letters of Brook Foss Westcott*, Vol. I, p.207).

“Our Bible as well as our Faith is a mere compromise”. (Westcott, *On the Canon of the New Testament*, p. vii).

“Evangelicals seem to me perverted. . .There are, I fear, still more serious differences between us on the subject of authority, especially the authority of the Bible”. (Hort, *The Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, Vol. I, p. 400)

“Dr. Wilbur Pickering writes that, Hort did not hold to a high view of inspiration”. (*The Identity of the New Testament Text*, p.212)

Perhaps this is why both the RV (which Westcott and Hort helped to translate) and the American edition of it, the ASV, translated 2nd Timothy 3:16 as, “Every scripture inspired of God” instead of “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (KJV).

The Deity of Christ:

“He never speaks of Himself directly as God, but the aim of His revelation was to lead men to see God in Him”. (Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 297).

“(John) does not expressly affirm the identification of the Word with Jesus Christ”. (Westcott, *Ibid.*, p. 16).

“(Rev. 3:15) might no doubt bear the Arian meaning, the first thing created”. (Hort, *Revelation*, p. 36).

Perhaps this is why their Greek text makes Jesus a created god (John 1:18) and their American translation had a footnote concerning John 9:38, “And he said, Lord I believe and he worshipped him,” which said, “The Greek word denotes an act of reverence, whether paid to a creature, as here, or to the Creator” (thus calling Christ a creature).

Salvation:

“The thought (of John 10:29) is here traced back to its most absolute form as resting on the essential power of God in His relation of Universal Fatherhood”. (Westcott, *St. John*, p. 159).

“I confess I have no repugnance to the primitive doctrine of a ransom paid to Satan. I can see no other possible form in which the doctrine of a ransom is at all tenable; anything is better than the doctrine of a ransom to the father”. (Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter 1:1-2:17*, p. 77).

Perhaps this is why their Greek text adds to salvation in 1st Peter 2:2. And why their English version teaches universal salvation in Titus 2:11, “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (ASV).

Hell:

“(Hell is) not the place of punishment of the guilty, (it is) the common abode of departed spirits”. (Westcott, *Historic Faith*, pp.77-78).

“We have no sure knowledge of future punishment, and the word eternal has a far higher meaning”. (Hort, *Life and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 149).

Perhaps this is why their Greek text does not have Mark 9:44, and their English translation replaces “everlasting fire” [Matthew 18:8] with “eternal fire” and change the meaning of eternal as cited by Hort in the above quote.

Creation:

“No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history. I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did”. (Westcott, cited from Which Bible?, p. 191).

“But the book which has most engaged me is Darwin. Whatever may be thought of it, it is a book that one is proud to be contemporary with..... My feeling is strong that the theory is unanswerable”. (Hort, cited from Which Bible?, p. 189)

Romanism:

“I wish I could see to what forgotten truth Mariolatry (the worship of the Virgin Mary) bears witness”. (Westcott, Ibid.)

“The pure Romanish view seems to be nearer, and more likely to lead to the truth than the Evangelical”. (Hort, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 77)

It is one thing to have doctrinal differences on baby-sprinkling and perhaps a few other interpretations. It is another to be a Darwin-believing theologian who rejects the authority of scriptures, Biblical salvation, the reality of hell, and makes Christ a created being to be worshipped with Mary his mother. Yet, these were the views of both Westcott and Hort. No less significant is the fact that both men were members of spiritist societies (the Hermes Club and the Ghostly Guild).

Westcott and Hort talked to Spirits of the dead.

I call it Satanism.

Westcott and Hort

Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1903) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892) have been highly controversial figures in biblical history.

On one side, their supporters have heralded them as great men of God, having greatly advanced the search for the original Greek text.

On the other side, their opponents have leveled charges of heresy, infidelity, apostasy, and many others, claiming that they are guilty of wreaking great damage on the true text of Scripture.

I have no desire to sling mud nor a desire to hide facts.

I believe it is essential at this time that we examine what we know about these men and their theories concerning the text of the Bible.

I long sought for copies of the books about their lives.

These are The Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott, by his son, Arthur, and The Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort, written by his son.

After literally months of trying, I was able to acquire copies of them both for study. Most of the material in this section will be directly from these sources so as to prevent it from being secondhand.

We cannot blindly accept the finding of any scholar without investigating what his beliefs are concerning the Bible and its doctrines. Scholarship alone makes for an inadequate and dangerous authority, therefore we are forced to scrutinize these men's lives.

A Monumental Switch

Westcott and Hort were responsible for the greatest feat in textual criticism. They were responsible for replacing the Universal Text of the Authorized Version with the Local Text of Egypt and the Roman Catholic Church. Both Westcott and Hort were known to have resented the pre-eminence given to the Authorized Version and its underlying Greek Text. They had been deceived into believing that the Roman Catholic manuscripts, Vaticanus and Aleph, were better because they were old-

er. This they believed, even though Hort admitted that the Antiochian or Universal Text was equal in antiquity.

Hort said:

“The fundamental Text of late extant Greek MSS generally is beyond all question identical with the dominant Antiochian or Graeco-Syrian Text of the second half of the 4th century”. (Hort, *The Factor of Genealogy*, pg 92—as cited by Burgon, *Revision Revised*, pg 257).

Vicious Prejudice

In spite of the fact that the readings of the Universal Text were found to be as old, or older, Westcott and Hort still sought to dislodge it from its place of high standing in biblical history. Hort occasionally let his emotions show...

Hort said:

“I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS.; it is a blessing there are such early ones”. (Life, Vol. I, p. 211).

Westcott and Hort built their own Greek text based primarily on a few uncial MSS of the Local Text. It has been stated earlier that these perverted MSS do not even agree among themselves. The ironic thing is that Westcott and Hort knew this when they formed their text!

Burgon exposed Dr. Hort’s confession. Even Hort had occasion to notice an instance of the Concordia discourse. Commenting on the four places in Mark’s Gospel (14:30, 68, 72, a, b) where the cocks crowing is mentioned said:

“The confusion of attestation introduced by these several cross currents of change is so great that of the seven principal MSS, Aleph, A, B, C, D, L, no two have the same text in all four places”. 87

A Shocking Revelation

That these men should lend their influence to a family of MSS which have a history of attacking and diluting the major doctrines of the Bible, should not come as a surprise. Oddly enough, neither man believed that the Bible should be treated any differently than the writings of the lost historians and philosophers!

Hort wrote, quote:

For ourselves, we dare not introduce considerations which could not reasonably be applied to other ancient texts, supposing them to have documentary attestation of equal amount, variety and antiquity. 88

He also states, Quote: In the New Testament, as in almost all prose writings which have been much copied, corruptions by interpolation are many times more numerous than corruptions by omission. (Emphasis mine.) 89

We must consider these things for a moment. How can God use men who do not believe that His Book is any different than Shakespeare, Plato, or Dickens? It is a fundamental belief that the Bible is different from all other writings. Why did these men not believe so?

Blatant Disbelief

Their skepticism does, in fact, go even deeper. They have both become famous for being able to deny scriptural truth and still be upheld by fundamental Christianity as biblical authorities! Both Westcott and Hort failed to accept the basic Bible doctrines which we hold so dear and vital to our fundamental faith.

Hort denies the reality of Eden:

I am inclined to think that no such state as Eden (I mean the popular notion) ever existed, and that Adams fall in no degree differed from the fall of each of his descendants, as Coleridge justly argues. ⁹⁰

Furthermore, he took sides with the apostate authors of Essays and Reviews.

Hort writes to Rev. Rowland Williams, October 21, 1858,

“Further I agree with them [Authors of Essays and Reviews] in condemning many leading specific doctrines of the popular theology ... Evangelicals seem to me perverted rather than untrue. There are, I fear, still more serious differences between us on the subject of authority, and especially the authority of the Bible”. ⁹¹

We must also confront Hort’s disbelief that the Bible was infallible:

“If you make a decided conviction of the absolute infallibility of the N.T. practically a sine qua non for co-operation, I fear I could not join you”.

He also stated:

“As I was writing the last words a note came from Westcott. He too mentions having had fears, which he now pronounces groundless, on the strength of our last conversation, in which he discovered that I did recognize Providente in biblical writings. Most strongly I recognize it; but I am not prepared to say that it necessarily involves absolute infallibility. So I still await judgment”.

And further commented to a colleague:

“But I am not able to go as far as you in asserting the absolute infallibility of a canonical writing”. ⁹²

Strange Bedfellows

Though unimpressed with the evangelicals of his day, Hort had great admiration for Charles Darwin! To his colleague, B.F. Westcott, he wrote excitedly:

“...Have you read Darwin? How I should like to talk with you about it! In spite of difficulties, I am inclined to think it unanswerable. In any case it is a treat to read such a book”.

And to John Ellerton he writes:

“But the book which has most engaged me is Darwin. Whatever may be thought of it, it is a book that one is proud to be contemporary with ... My feeling is strong that the theory is unanswerable. If so, it opens up a new period”. ⁹³

Dr. Hort was also an adherent to the teaching of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. His son writes:

“In undergraduate days, if not before, he came under the spell of Coleridge”. ⁹⁴

“Coleridge was the college drop-out whose drug addiction is an historical fact. The opium habit, begun earlier to deaden the pain of rheumatism, grew stronger. After vainly trying in Malta and Italy to break away from opium, Coleridge came back to England in 1806”. ⁹⁵

“One of Coleridge’s famous works is Aids to Reflection. Its chief aim is to harmonize formal Christianity with Coleridge’s variety of transcendental philosophy. He also did much to introduce Immanuel Kant and other German philosophers to English readers”. ⁹⁶

This man, Coleridge, had a great influence on the two scholars from Cambridge. Forsaking Colossians 2:8, Hort was also a lover of Greek philosophy. In writing to Mr. A. MacMillian, he stated:

“You seem to make (Greek) philosophy worthless for those who have received the Christian revelation. To me, though in a hazy way, it seems full of precious truth of which I find nothing, and should be very much astonished and perplexed to find anything in revelation”. ⁹⁷

Lost in the Forest

In some cases Hort seemed to wander in the woods. In others he can only be described as utterly lost in the forest. Take, for example, his views on fundamental Bible truths...

Hort's Devil

Concerning existence of a personal devil he wrote:

“The discussion which immediately precedes these four lines naturally leads to another enigma most intimately connected with that of everlasting penalties, namely that of the personality of the devil. It was Coleridge who some three years ago first raised any doubts in my mind on the subject - doubts which have never yet been at all set at rest, one way or the other. You yourself are very cautious in your language”.

“Now if there be a devil, he cannot merely bear a corrupted and marred image of God; he must be wholly evil, his name evil, his every energy and act evil. Would it not be a violation of the divine attributes for the Word to be actively the support of such a nature as that?”⁹⁸

Hort's Hell

Hort also shrunk from the belief in a literal, eternal hell.

“I think Maurice's letter to me sufficiently showed that we have no sure knowledge respecting the duration of future punishment, and that the word eternal has a far higher meaning than the merely material one of excessively long duration; extinction always grates against my mind as something impossible.”⁹⁹

Certainly in my case it proceeds from no personal dread; when I have been living most godlessly, I have never been able to frighten myself with visions of a distant future, even while I held the doctrine.¹⁰⁰

Hort's Purgatory

Although the idea of a literal devil and a literal hell found no place in Hort's educated mind, he was a very real believer in the factious Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

To Rev. John Ellerton he wrote in 1854:

I agree with you in thinking it a pity that Maurice verbally repudiates purgatory, but I fully and unwaveringly agree with him in the three cardinal points of the controversy: (1) that eternity is independent of duration; (2) that the power of repentance is not limited to this life; (3) that it is not revealed whether or not all will ultimately repent. The modern denial of the second has, I suppose, had more to do with the despiritualizing of theology than almost anything that could be named.¹⁰¹

Also while advising a young student he wrote:

The idea of purgation, of cleansing as by fire, seems to me inseparable from what the Bible teaches us of the Divine chastisements; and, though little is directly said respecting the future state, it seems to me incredible that the Divine chastisements should in this respect change their character when this visible life is ended. I do not hold it contradictory to the Article to think that the condemned doctrine has not been wholly injurious, inasmuch as it has kept alive some sort of belief in a great and important truth.¹⁰²

Thus we see that Dr. Hort's opinions were certainly not inhibited by orthodoxy. Yet his wayward ways do not end here. For, as his own writings display, Dr. Hort fell short in several other fundamental areas.

Hort's Atonement

There was also his rejection of Christ's atoning death for the sins of all mankind.

"The fact is, I do not see how Gods justice can be satisfied without every man's suffering in his own person the full penalty for his sins".¹⁰³

In fact, Hort considered the teachings of Christs atonement as heresy!

"Certainly nothing can be more unscriptural than the modern limiting of Christs bearing our sins and sufferings to His death; but indeed that is only one aspect of an almost universal heresy".¹⁰⁴

The fact is, that Hort believed Satan more worthy of accepting Christs payment for sins than God.

"I confess I have no repugnance to the primitive doctrine of a ransom paid to Satan, though neither am I prepared to give full assent to it. But I can see no other possible form in which the doctrine of a ransom is at all tenable; anything is better than the notion of a ransom paid to the Father".¹⁰⁵

Hort's Baptism

Dr. Hort also believed that the Roman Catholic teaching of baptismal regeneration was more correct than the evangelical teaching.

...at the same time in language stating that we maintain Baptismal Regeneration as the most important of doctrines ... the pure Romish view seems to me nearer, and more likely to lead to, the truth than the Evangelical.¹⁰⁶

He also states that, Baptism assures us that we are children of God, members of Christ and His body, and heirs of the heavenly kingdom.¹⁰⁷

In fact, Hort's heretical view of baptism probably cost his own son his eternal soul, as we find Hort assuring his eldest son, Arthur, that his infant baptism was his salvation:

You were not only born into the world of men. You were also born of Christian parents in a Christian land. While yet an infant you were claimed for God by being made in Baptism an unconscious member of His Church, the great Divine Society which has lived on unceasingly from the Apostles time till now. You have been surrounded by Christian influences; taught to lift up your eyes to the Father in heaven as your own Father; to feel yourself in a wonderful sense a member or part of Christ, united to Him by strange invisible bonds; to know that you have as your birthright a share in the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰⁸

Hort's Twisted Belief

Along with Hort's unregenerated misconceptions of basic Bible truths, there were his quirkish and sometimes quackish personal beliefs. One such example is his hatred for democracy, as he asserts in a letter to Rev. Westcott dated April 28, 1865:

"...I dare not prophesy about America, but I cannot say that I see much as yet to soften my deep hatred of democracy in all its forms".¹⁰⁹

It is not an amazing thing that any one man could hold to so many unscriptural and ungodly beliefs. It is amazing that such a man could be exalted by Bible believing preachers and professors to a point of authority higher than the King James Bible!

Dr. Hort was a truly great Greek scholar, yet a great intellect does not make one an authority over the Bible when they themselves do not even claim to believe it! Albert Einstein was a man of great intellect, but he rejected Scripture, and so where he speaks on the subject of Scripture he is not to be accepted as authoritative. Possessing a great mind or great ability does not guarantee being a great spiritual leader. Dr. Hort was a scholar, but his scholarship alone is no reason to accept his theories concerning Bible truth.

If fundamental pastors of today enlisted the services of an evangelist and found that this evangelist had beliefs paralleling those of Fenton John Anthony Hort, I believe that the pastor would cancel the meeting. Strangely through, when a pastor discovers such to be true about Dr. Hort, he excuses him as a great Greek scholar and presents his Authorized Version to him to be maliciously dissected and then discarded as Dr. Hort sets himself down in the seat of authority which the Bible once held. Here again I must assert that most often this is done with childlike faith on the part of the pastor, due to the education he received while in seminary. The seminary is not really guilty either, for they have simply and unsuspectingly accepted the authority of two men raised under the influence of a campaign by the Jesuits to re-Romanize England. Wilkenson reports that Hort had been influenced by these Roman Catholic forces: Dr. Hort tell us that the writings of Simon had a large share in the movement to discredit the Textus Receptus class of MSS and Bibles.¹¹⁹

Problems with Westcott

Unfortunately for the new Bible supporters, Dr. Westcott's credentials are even more anti-biblical. Westcott did not believe that Genesis 1-3 should be taken literally. He also thought that Moses and David were poetic characters whom Jesus Christ referred to by name only because the common people accepted them as authentic.

Westcott states:

“No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history - I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did - yet they disclose to us a Gospel. So it is probably elsewhere. Are we not going through a trial in regard to the use of popular language on literary subjects like that through which we went, not without sad losses in regard to the use of popular language on physical subjects? If you feel now that it was, to speak humanly, necessary that the Lord should speak of the sun rising, it was no less necessary that he would use the names Moses and David as His contemporaries used them... There was no critical question at issue. (Poetry is, I think, a thousand times more true than History; this is a private parenthesis for myself alone.)¹²⁰

He also said David is not a chronological but a spiritual person.¹²¹

That the first three chapter of Genesis are all allegory has been believed by liberals and modernists for years. Do today's fundamentalists realize that those modernists beliefs were nurtures in the heart of this Bible critic?

Westcott was also a doubter of the Biblical account of miracles: I never read an account of a miracle but I seem instinctively to feel its improbability, and discover somewhat of evidence in the account of it.¹²²

If a great fundamental preacher of our day were to make this statement, he would be called apostate, but what then of Westcott?

Westcott believed that the second coming of Jesus Christ was not a physical coming but a spiritual coming: “As far as I can remember, I said very shortly what I hold to be the Lord's coming in my little book on the Historic Faith. I hold very strongly that the Fall of Jerusalem was the coming which first fulfilled the Lords words; and, as there have been other comings, I cannot doubt that He is coming' to us now.¹²³

Westcott's Heaven

Wait! This fundamental doctrine is not the last one to be denied by Bishop Westcott, for he believed Heaven to be a state and not a literal place. Note the following quotations from Bishop Westcott: No doubt the language of the Rubric is unguarded, but it saves us from the error of connecting the Presence of Christ's glorified humanity with place; heaven is a state and not a place.¹²⁴

Yet the unseen is the largest part of life. Heaven lies about us now in infancy alone; and by swift, silent pauses for thought, for recollection, for aspiration, we cannot only keep fresh the influence of that diviner atmosphere, but breathe it more habitually.¹²⁵

We may reasonably hope, by patient, resolute, faithful, united endeavor to find heaven about us here, the glory of our earthly life.¹²⁶

Westcott's Newmanism

Dr. Westcott was also deeply devoted to John Newman, the Roman Catholic defector who took 150 Church of England clergymen with him when he made the change. Those of his disciples who did not make the physical change to Rome, made the spiritual change to Romanism, though many, like Westcott, never admitted it.

These are the convictions of a man greatly responsible for the destruction of Christian faith in the Greek Text of the Authorized Version. Place Mr. Westcott next to any present fundamental preacher or educator, and he would be judged a modernist, liberal and heretic. In spite of his outstanding ability in Greek, a man of his convictions would not be welcome on the campus of any truly Christian college in America. This is not an overstatement, nor is it malicious. The Christian colleges of today hold very high standards and simply would not settle for a man of such apostate conviction, no matter how great his ability to teach a given subject.

END

Footnotes:

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- 89 Fuller, David, *True or False*, (Grand Rapids International Publications, Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 240.
- 90 Hort, Arthur Fenton, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, (New York, 1896), Volume I, p. 78.
- 91 Ibid., p. 400.
- 92 Ibid., pp. 420-422.
- 93 Ibid., pp. 414-416.
- 94 Ibid., p. 42.
- 95 *New Standard Encyclopedia*, (Standard Educational Corporation, 1977), p. 450.
- 96 Ibid., pp. c450-451.
- 97 Hort, Arthur Fenton, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, (New York, 1896), Volume I, p. 449.
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- 103 Ibid., Volume I, p. 120.
- 104 Ibid., p. 430.
- 105 Ibid., p. 428.
- 106 Ibid., p. 76.
- 107 Ibid., Volume II, p. 81.
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- 109 Ibid., p. 34.
- 110 Ibid., Volume I, pp. 458,459.
- 111 Ibid., p. 458.
- 112 Ibid., Volume II, p. 207.
- 113 Ibid., Volume I, p. 130.

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116 Ibid., p. 139.

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119 Wilkenson, Benjamin, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, (Takoma Park, 1930), p. 104.

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122 Ibid., Volume I, p. 52.

123 Ibid., Volume II, p. 308.

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