

***Sir Frederic George Kenyon, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.Litt., LL.D.,
F.B.A., F.S.A.
1863-1952.***

(President of the Victoria Institute, 1946-1952.)

F.F. Bruce

[p.xv]

By the passing of Sir Frederic Kenyon on August 23rd, 1952, full of years and honours, not only the Victoria Institute but many another good cause and learned society has lost a valued friend and supporter.

Few men of our time have combined in so distinguished and happy a degree deep and exact scholarship with an understanding of the necessity for making the findings of scholarship available to non-specialists, and personal capacity for making them thus available.

Kenyon went from Winchester to New College, Oxford, in 1882, and after gaining a First Class both in Moderations and *Litteræ Humaniores*, was elected to a Fellowship at Magdalen. In 1889 he became Assistant in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum—*felix opportunitate*, for it was by his work on the new papyrus treasures which had begun to find their way to the Museum that he first made his name in the world of scholarship. Within some eight years from his appointment he had edited Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens*, the *Mimes* of Herodas, Hyperides' oration *Against Philippides*, and the lyrics of Bacchylides. The production of these *editiones principes* brought lustre not only to Kenyon himself but to the Museum which he served. In 1898 he was promoted to be Deputy Keeper of his Department, and in 1909 he became Director and Principal Librarian of the Museum, a position which he filled with distinction until his retirement in 1930. Even after his retirement he maintained his association with the Museum: he edited for its Trustees the Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, acquired in 1931, and he played an important part in the Museum's acquisition of the Codex Sinaiticus in 1933.

The reference to these Biblical manuscripts reminds us that it was probably his work in this field that brought Kenyon's name most prominently before the Christian public of this and other lands. In 1895 he published *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, a work which presented the apparatus and findings

[p.xvi]

of Biblical textual criticism to the intelligent reader who had no expert qualifications or aspirations but desired an authoritative account of the subject which he could understand. The work was an immediate success, and was brought up to date from time to time in new editions, the latest revision being that of 1939. For the student of the Greek Bible, Kenyon provided two handbooks in the same field—*The Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (1901; 2nd edn., 1926) and *The Text of the Greek Bible*, a volume in Duckworth's theological series (1937; 2nd edn., 1949). This was his chosen field, too, when he delivered the Schweich Lectures in Biblical Archaeology for 1932, *Recent Developments in the Textual Criticism of the Greek Bible*. Among his other books for the general reader may be mentioned *Books and*

Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome (1932), *The Story of the Bible* (1936), *The Bible and Archaeology* (1940), *The Reading of the Bible* (1944), and *The Bible and Modern Scholarship* (1948). Although he was not primarily an archaeologist, his book on *The Bible and Archaeology* was a remarkably successful introduction to the subject, representing the position of Biblical archaeology as it stood on the eve of World War II. *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*,¹ almost the latest work to come from his pen, was a brief review of the Bishop of Birmingham's volume on *The Rise of Christianity*, urbanely but devastatingly exposing the Bishop's "imbecility of scholarship" and his flouting of all "bibliographical probability".

Kenyon had ample scope for his desire to open the world of learning as widely as possible to the general public during his years as Director of the British Museum, and there are many who can testify to the success of his policy. He lost no opportunity of urging other learned bodies to include such worthy popularization among their aims. The last occasion on which the present writer heard him speak was at the Jubilee Dinner of the Society for Old Testament Study in January, 1950, when he exhorted the members with no little moral fervour to do all in their power to restore a reasonable and intelligent faith in the trustworthiness of Holy Scripture by making the reassuring results of modern Biblical study as widely known as possible.

It was a signal honour to the Victoria Institute when Kenyon, who had already served the British Academy and the Hellenic Society as President, accepted the invitation to become our President in 1946, in succession to the late Sir Charles Marston. He had already been elected a Life Fellow of the Institute (1939)

[p.xvii }

and a Vice-President (1943), and had read four papers before the Institute—"Recent Developments in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament" (*Journal of Transactions*, 65, 1933), "Ras Shamra, Mari and Atchana" (73, 1941), "Greek Manuscripts and Archaeology" (75, 1943), and "The Fourth Gospel" (77, 1945). This last paper was a well-informed defence of the first-century date, apostolic authorship, and historical trustworthiness of St. John's Gospel, in which special emphasis was laid on the significance of the Rylands papyrus fragment of John 18, dated early in the second century.

As President, Sir Frederic addressed the Institute in four successive years from 1947 to 1950. The titles of his Presidential Addresses, published in the appropriate annual volumes of our Transactions, were "The Bible and Criticism" (1947), "New Testament Criticism To-day" (1948), "Jesus Christ or Karl Marx" (1949), and "The Institute and Biblical Criticism" (1950). In matters of Biblical criticism Kenyon himself showed how a conservative position can be completely free from obscurantism or mere traditionalism; he welcomed all rational criticism, both literary, historical and textual, while considering that many theologians, especially on the continent, had allowed themselves to go to extremes which tended to bring even sane criticism into disrepute, by following novelty instead of probability as the very guide of life. He repeatedly insisted that the Victoria Institute has a valuable service to perform in the present generation, by "claiming a position in the vanguard of progress" and bringing home to our contemporaries the sound basis on which modern scholarship has placed the authenticity and reliability of the foundation documents of the Christian faith, which record the progressive revelation of God to man, finding its consummation in Jesus Christ. This charge

¹ [online at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bible_kenyon.pdf]

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he has bequeathed as a sacred trust to us. But he has done more: by his own example he has shown us how to discharge it.

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