

Tiberias. Precisely how far back we can trace it is a question of interest for Old Testament students at any time. But the interest is deepening to-day, and on two grounds,—for its bearing on the authenticity of the Pentateuch, and for its bearing on the adjustment of the text in detail. As regards authenticity, the further back we can trace a special line of transmission the stronger is our proof of the antiquity of the book. As regards correctness of text, let it be remembered that the science of textual criticism has passed through these stages. When the remains of Greek and Latin literature were first printed, editors compared the readings of different copies, and adopted that which yielded the best sense. The vote of a majority of manuscripts had considerable influence, but intrinsic probability might overbear it. In course of time it came to be realized that textual errors in a recent copy are an accumulation of copyists' mistakes made in the course of a long line of transmission, and so criticism reached a second stage when special pains were taken to discover the very oldest manuscripts, and special importance attached to their readings. Even that method, however, may prove misleading. An old manuscript may be very inaccurate; whereas a recent one may preserve faithfully the readings of a separate source that was more accurate than any manuscript now in existence. So attention came to be given to the genealogical classification of manuscripts; the lines of transmission being discriminated from each other as far as possible. Of course other considerations come into account. But, speaking broadly, the question now is, not what reading is supported by the largest number of manuscripts, or by the oldest, but what reading has the largest support from distinct families of manuscripts. Now, as it happens, there are only two families of Hebrew manuscripts, the Masoretic and the Samaritan.

For these reasons the question is coming to be a live one. How far back can we date the Samaritan text? Three answers may be given—the time of Solomon, the time of Hezekiah, or the time of Sanballat the Horonite. The Samaritans of Nablous go a great deal higher, ascribing this old manuscript to Abishua the son of Phinehas, who lived 3500 years ago. The book is much worn, and patched in places, but neither handwriting nor vellum seemed to Dr. Robinson to be of very high antiquity. So long