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THE SOURCES OF THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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THE manuscripts written by the sacred writers having long since perished, we are compelled of necessity to derive the text of those writings from other than the original sources. We are not, however, left without abundant materials from which to construct the text with almost infallible certainty, for although the originals themselves are lost, yet there have been preserved to us very many manuscript copies, made with greatest care by loving and skilful hands. These MSS., which constitute the chief and most important source of the New Testament text, are greatly more numerous, and in most cases more ancient, than those of any profane author of any country. Indeed, the writings of only very few profane authors have come down to our time in more than ten or twelve MSS., and those of comparatively recent date. A "Virgil" in the Vatican Library claims to be of the 4th century; but most of the classics are as recent as the 10th.

The MSS. of the New Testament, however, reach the large number of 1583, and range in antiquity from the early part of the 4th century to the 15th; and although Tischendorf made, a few years ago, an examination of almost all the important libraries of Europe, Asia, and Africa—being rewarded by the discovery of the "Codex Sinaiticus" (Sinai MSS.)—yet it may be possible that still further additions shall be made to our list. This large number of MSS., many of which are fragmentary, are divided into two great classes—Uncials and Cursives—according to the style in which they are written.