The aim of the “ textual critic ” may then be defined as the restoration of the text, as far as possible, to its original form, if by “ original form ” we understand the form intended by its author.

*Texts* may be either *autographs* or they may be *transmitted* texts; the latter, again, being *immediate copies* of autographs or *copies* *of* *copies* in any degree.

Autographs (which may be taken to include whatever, though not actually in the writing of its author, has been revised and attested by him) are not exempt from the operations of textual criticism. Editors of journals remove the slips of the pens of their contributors; editors of books, nowadays usually in footnotes, the similar lapses of their authors. With this branch of textual criticism, however, modern scholarship is not largely concerned. Not so with *immediate copies.* Textual criticism is called upon to repair the mischief done to *inscriptions* (texts inscribed upon stones) by weathering, maltreatment or the errors of the stone-cutter. Any great collection, such as the *Corpus* of Latin inscriptions or the similar *Corpus* of Greek, will show at once its activity and ability in this direction.

The chief field of textual criticism is elsewhere. The texts of the older authors which have come down to us were written for the most part not on stone but on papyrus, parchment or other perishable material. Of these several copies had to be made, both by way of prevention against the wear and tear of use and as a means of satisfying the desire of other persons than the original possessor to be acquainted with their contents. Had the copies made of ancient writings been mechanical reproductions of the originals, such as the photographic fac­similes of modern times, there would have been little here for textual criticism to do. The ancient texts have not come to us in this way, but through copies made by the human hand directed more or less by the human intelligence. Now a copy made thus can in no circumstances be a quite exact rendering of that from which it is copied or its *exemplar.* A copy, *qua* copy, can never be the equal of the exemplar, and it may be much its inferior. This deterioration increases with the number of successive copyings. Let us suppose that from a text which we will call A a copy has been made which we will call B, and from this again a copy which we will call C. If the copyist of B goes wrong once and the copyist of C twice in a hundred times, then, assuming that there is no coincidence or cancelling of errors, the relative correctness of the three texts A, B, C will be 100 (absolute correctness), 99 and 97∙02. If C had made his copy direct from A, his percentage would have been 98. The importance of this must be borne in mind when we are dealing with *transmitted texts,* which have passed through many stages of copying.

In the *Epidicus* of Plautus, 1. 1. 10, the right reading *habitior,* “ more portly,” has been preserved to us by Donatus, an ancient commentator on Terence (*Eunuchus,* 2. 2. 11). It was corrupted to *abilior* by omission of the *h* and confusion of *t* and *l*, and this corruption, which is attested by the oldest extant copy, the Ambrosian palimpsest, was still further corrupted in the other copies to *agilior.*

The first step towards the restoration of a text is the examina­tion of the evidence upon which it is or is to be based. This begins with the investigation of its traditional or transmitted form. For this we have usually to rely upon *manuscripts* (MSS.). By manuscripts (*q.v.*) we understand copies of the text made before the art of printing came into general use. These may be either *extant* or *non-extant.* The evidence of extant manuscripts must be ascertained by *collation.* To collate a manuscript is to observe and record everything in it which may be of use towards determining what stood in the source or the sources from which it is derived. A manuscript is not usually a clean or single piece of writing; it is commonly found to contain alterations by erasure, addition or substitu­tion. Such alterations may be due to the writer or writers of the MS., called the *scribe* or *scribes,* or to some other person or persons (for there may be several) called *correctors.* The relative importance of these corrections, it is obvious, may be very different. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the different *hands* which have been at work on the manuscript. Account must also be taken of the number of lines in each page, the number of pages in each quire, of gaps or lacunae in the manuscript, and so forth. The work cannot be considered complete till all the extant manuscripts have been collated or at least examined.

When this is done we shall have the materials for pronouncing a judgment upon the text as *directly transmitted.* Perhaps there is only one extant MS. of the text, as. in the case of the *Mimes* of Herodas and the *Annals* and *Histories* of Tacitus. Then this part of our work is done.

But often we have to take account of a number, and it may be a large number, of manuscripts, whose respective claims to attention we must determine. In the first place we shall discard all manuscripts which are *derived* by copying *from other extant manuscripts.* If a MS. is immediately or ultimately derived by copying from another MS., it cannot, *qua* copy, tell us anything that we do not know already if the latter MS. is known to us. But how can we tell that a MS. is so derived? It must be later than the other AIS., *and* the similarity between them must be such as to permit of no other explanation. In the absence of explicit dates the relative age of MSS. is often hard to determine, and hence the criterion of unmistakable resemblance is one of special importance. If the MSS. agree in singular though trivial mistakes, if they omit, apparently without motive, words and passages which other MSS. preserve, we shall be safe in pronouncing that there exists a close bond of connexion between them, and if one of them shows errors which, though strange in themselves, are quite intelligible when we see what stands in the other, then we shall be justified in concluding that the second is that from which the first is derived. For the proper consideration of such points a personal examination, *autopsy,* of the A1SS. or of facsimiles of them, is very often indispensable. It was thought at one time that a MS. of the Latin poet Propertius at Naples *(Neap.* 268) might have independent value as an authority for the text. But its claims were disposed of when (amongst other facts) it was ob­served that at book iv. 8, 3, the MS. with which it most closely agreed (F, No. 36, 49 in the Laurentian library) had a gap at the beginning of the line and only the end words “uetus est tυtela draconis,” with the marginal note *“ non potuit legi* in exemplari hoc quod deficit,” and that *Neap.* 268 gives the fine as follows, “ *non potuit legi* uetus est tutela draconis.”

Accident apart, *identity of reading implies identity of sources.* The source of a transmitted reading may undoubtedly be the author’s autograph: but if not, then it is some MS. in the line of transmission.

The peculiar resemblances of two MSS., though not sufficient to warrant the derivation of either from the other, may be sufficient to establish some connexion between them. From the axiom which has just been cited it follows that this con­nexion can be due only to community of source, and we thus arrive at the idea of *families of MSS.* Suppose that a text is preserved in seven AISS., A, B, C, D, E, F, G. If we find that of these A stands apart, showing no great similarity to any of the other six, while B, C, D on the one side, and E, F, G on the other, much resemble each other though differing considerably from the rest, we may express this by saying that B, C, D form a “ family ” descended from a hypothetical common “ ancestor ” which we may call X, and E, F, G another “ family ” descended from a hypothetical “ ancestor ” which we may call Y. The readings of X which can be deduced from considering the agree­ments in B, C, D will be of higher antiquity and of greater external authority than any of the readings in B, C, D taken singly. And similarly for the readings of Y and those of E, F, G. Nor shall we stop here: but we shall further compare the readings of X and Y with each other and with those of A, and thus deduce the readings of a still more remote ancestor which we may call Z. Z will be the *archetype of* all our existing MSS., and we may embody our results in a *pedigree* of manuscripts or *stemma codicum* as follows:—