

Was Westcott a Homosexual?

by James May^[1]

King James Only accusers reach their lowest depths when they suggest that if Brooke Foss Westcott was not himself a homosexual, he was at least a willing companion of such. To this writer's knowledge, the filthy accusation was first made by Mrs. Gail Riplinger and then parroted by David Sorenson in the major project for his doctor of ministries degree at Pensacola Christian College. Homosexual activity was allegedly practiced by members of the Hermes Club, a speakers' group organized by Westcott during his undergraduate days at Cambridge University. Sorenson touches the unclean thing with his statement that "It seems that the occult^[2] was not the only activity at the Hermes Club." He then goes on to allege that club members engaged in homosexuality.^[3] This accusation is all based upon material found in Gauld's The Founders of Psychological Research and upon Hermes as supposedly a god who was androgynous.^[4] I say "supposedly" after reading the Encyclopedia Britannica article on Hermes and finding no mention of either androgyny or homosexuality in connection with this Greek god.^[5] This article presents a *prima facie* case against either concept as being prominently connected with Hermes. Hermes was the god of oration, as seen in Acts 14:12.

Both Riplinger and Sorenson in their footnotes refer to the same pages in The Founders of Psychological Research^[6] as "proof" that members of Westcott's clubs engaged in homosexual activity. I have reproduced the material below in three paragraphs. The first paragraph is taken from the main text in Gauld, which text has a reference to footnote #3. The second paragraph contains footnote #3, and the third paragraph contains further material referenced within footnote #3.

Few liked him [Frederic Myers], and some detested him. His closest friend during his early years at Cambridge was Arthur Sidgwick, a clever young classic in the year above him. Their relationship was of an emotional and aesthetic kind, and its intensesness may well have caused unfavourable comment, so adding to Myers' unpopularity,³ (Gauld, p. 90).

³Phyllis Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds*, London, 1964, quotes (pp. 114-15) a letter from J.A. Symonds to H.G. Dakyns (the original of which I have seen) which says that Myers and Arthur Sidgwick were 'assailed by the same disease' (i.e. homosexuality) as Symonds. I have noticed one or two points in Myers' letters which are consistent with, though they do not exactly support, the notion that Myers went through such a phase; and cf. the second passage from *Fragments*, p. 10, quoted below. But he had certainly developed normal tendencies within a few years. I think that homosexuality was not rare amongst young university classicists in those restricted days, (Gauld, p. 90-1, footnote #3).

[The classics, Myers was to write thirty years after his undergraduate days at Cambridge,] drew from me and fostered evil as well as good; they might aid imaginative impulse and detachment from sordid interests, but they had no check for lust or pride, (Myers in *Fragments*, p. 10 quoted by Gauld, p. 92).

In summary, the documentation and Gauld's conclusions suggest that for some period of probably not more than a few years, Frederic Myers engaged in homosexuality with Arthur Sidgwick. It should be noted that Gauld does not say that Myers or Sidgwick were members of "Westcott's clubs" (and with good reason). We will now examine what has been made of this, first by Gail Riplinger, and then by David Sorenson.

One secular historian cites letters between members of Westcott's clubs and refers to the "intensity" of a "homosexual" relationship between members (i.e., Arthur Sidgwick, Frederic Myers); he comments, "I think that homosexuality was not rare among young classicists. . ." (Riplinger, p. 401).

Contrary to Riplinger's statement and as the reader can see above, Gauld does not cite "letters between members of Westcott's clubs." The single letter that he does cite with any identification of its recipient was written by J.A. Symonds to H.G. Dakyns, neither of whom were members of any of "Westcott's clubs."^[7] The implication that "love

letters" exist between male members of the clubs is entirely false. Further, the "secular historian" (Gauld) does not refer to the "intensity" of a "homosexual" relationship. He rather refers to a relationship that because of its intenseness *may have caused* unfavorable comment and *may have been* of a homosexual nature. Riplinger fails to inform us of Gauld's contention that "he [Myers] had certainly developed normal tendencies within a few years." She is entirely wrong in her statement that Myers and Arthur Sidgwick were members of "Westcott's clubs." They were not. Henry Sidgwick (not Arthur^[8]) was a member, not of the Hermes Club^[9], but of the much later Eranus Club. Henry Sidgwick went to Cambridge in 1855, seven years after the Hermes Club had its final meeting in 1848, and seventeen years before the first meeting of the Eranus Club in 1872. Assuming that Gauld's statement that Myers "developed normal tendencies within a few years" is correct, there is no room for him to have had a perverse relationship with either Arthur or Henry Sidgwick while either of them was a member of any club of which Westcott was also a member.

It may be hard to believe, but David Sorenson makes an even bigger mess than Riplinger of the material in Gauld:

It seems that the occult was not the only activity at the Hermes Club. A secular book tracing occult societies cited a letter between members of Westcott's club and refers to a homosexual relationship between members. That same source quoted a member of the club (Arthur Sidgwick to Frederic Meyers) admitting that homosexuality was not rare among them. There is no evidence that Westcott and Hort themselves were homosexuals. However, it appears that such activity took place amongst other members of a club in which they participated and which Westcott himself organized. Moreover, it also appears that such activities were no secret to other members of the club, (Sorenson, p. 175).

According to the botched up account by Sorenson, Arthur Sidgwick made the statement that "homosexuality was not rare among" members of the Hermes Club. The statement was actually made by Gauld in 1968 when he said, "I think that homosexuality was not rare amongst young university classicists in those restricted days," (Gauld, p. 90). The Hermes Club is not the focus of this statement. Sorenson apparently misread Riplinger's material without examining Gauld for himself (hardly the quality of research one might expect in a doctoral project). It is quite clear in the original source, The Founders of Psychical Research, that Gauld made the observation, not Sidgwick. He also repeats Riplinger's false idea that Gauld refers to a letter between members of Hermes. His biggest blunder, however, and one that he shares with Riplinger, is his failure to consider the chronology of the events he alleges. Is it really possible, as suggested by Sorenson, that two members of the Hermes Club, Arthur Sidgwick and Frederic Myers, engaged in homosexual activities while they were members of the club and that the other club members were aware of such activities? If Sorenson had actually done any careful research at all he would have known that the Hermes Club met from 1845 until 1848. This information is contained in Westcott's biography and is also repeated by Riplinger:

Westcott's 'Hermes' club met weekly for three years from 1845-1848, (Riplinger, p. 401).

The utter foolishness of Sorenson's contention can be easily demonstrated by turning to the article on Frederic Myers in the Encyclopedia Britannica, where we learn that Myers was born in 1843. Sorenson would have us believe that Myers was a member of Hermes when he was between the ages of two and five years. If Sorenson had read more carefully (or read at all?) The Founders of Psychical Research, he would have found the same information on page 38. The false statements of Riplinger and Sorenson cannot change the fact that neither Frederic Myers nor Arthur Sidgwick ever were, nor ever could have been, members of the Hermes Club.

To sum this up, no evidence has been produced which suggests that any member of the Hermes Club ever engaged in homosexuality. There is evidence that as an undergraduate student Arthur Sidgwick had a relationship with Frederic Myers. Some fifteen years later, long after Arthur Sidgwick had given up homosexual activity (according to Gauld), Henry Sidgwick joined a faculty discussion group at Cambridge called Eranus. Westcott was the founder of this group and invited Sidgwick to become a member. There is no evidence that Henry Sidgwick was involved in homosexuality at any time, nor is there any evidence that Westcott had any knowledge of what may have

transpired years before with Arthur. It appears that Riplinger has made an immense blunder by first confusing Arthur Sidgwick with Henry, second by confusing the Hermes Club with Eranus, and then by paying no attention to the chronology which makes her false accusations completely absurd. Sorenson must have simply derived his false information from Riplinger. Surely two people could not make such convoluted errors independently.

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[2] The idea that the Hermes Club engaged in the occult is simply more King James Only foolishness.

[3] David H. Sorenson, Touch Not The Unclean Thing (Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries, 2001), p. 175.

[4] Gail Riplinger, New Age Bible Versions (Ararat, VA: A.V. Publications, 1993, eleventh printing 2000) p. 401.

[5] Doug Kutilek also examined the articles on Hermes for me in The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature by Sir Paul Harvey and William Smith's A Smaller Classical Dictionary. Neither of these standard works mention androgyny or homosexuality in regard to Hermes.

[6] Alan Gauld, The Founders of Psychical Research (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 90-92.

[7] The members of "Westcott's clubs" are listed in Arthur Westcott, Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), Vol. I, pp. 46-48, 117-20, 384-86, and Arthur Hort, Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort (London: Macmillian and Co., 1896), Vol. I, pp. 171-72.

[8] Henry Sidgwick had a younger brother, Arthur. It is my supposition that this is he. "Henry Sidgwick." LoveToKnow 1911 Online Encyclopedia. Copyright 2003,2004 LoveToKnow.

[9] Both Riplinger and Sorenson make the homosexual accusation in their discussions of the Hermes Club and clearly in connection with the Hermes Club.