

**A DEFENCE OF THE
SURINAM
NEGRO-ENGLISH VERSION
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649350216

A Defence of the Surinam Negro-English Version of the New Testament by William Greenfield

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WILLIAM GREENFIELD

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A DEFENCE

OF THE

SURINAM NEGRO-ENGLISH VERSION

OF

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

FOUNDED ON

THE HISTORY OF THE NEGRO-ENGLISH VERSION, A VIEW OF THE SITUATION, POPULATION, AND HISTORY OF SURINAM, A PHILOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LANGUAGE, AND A CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF THE VERSION;

In Reply

TO

THE ANIMADVERSIONS OF AN ANONYMOUS WRITER

IN THE

EDINBURGH CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTOR.

BY

WILLIAM GREENFIELD,

Superintendent of the Editorial Department of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR SAMUEL BAGSTER,

No. 15, PATERNOSTER ROW;

AT THE WAREHOUSE FOR BIBLES, NEW TESTAMENTS, PRAYER BOOKS, AND PSALTERS, IN ANCIENT AND MODERN LANGUAGES.

ΠΟΛΛΑΙ ΜΕΝ ΒΥΒΛΟΙ ΓΛΩΤΤΑΙ, ΜΟΝ Δ' ΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΤΗΤΗ. — *Multi terrificis linguis, celestibus que.*

M.DCCC.XXX.

Price Two Shillings.

530.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY BAGSTER AND THOMS,
14, Bartholomew Close.



PREFACE.

IN the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, for December, 1829, appeared a few pointed and rather severe animadversions on the Negro-English New Testament. To this the Rev. C. Ign. Latrobe immediately replied, in a letter addressed to the Editor of that work. This communication, bearing date Jan. 4, 1830, did not, however, appear till the May following; for which delay this reason is assigned—"Because we" (the Editors, I suppose,) "could not till lately procure a copy of the Testament, which it was necessary to inspect, in order to estimate correctly the observations of our much-respected correspondent:" thus admitting that they, the Editors, had condemned the work, without having seen it, merely upon an *ex parte* statement! Whether they alluded to Mr. Latrobe as their "much-respected correspondent," or to the individual who furnished them with the information, does not very clearly appear. This communication, which certainly appeared, to my mind at least, to contain sufficient vindication of the Negro-English Testament, was only made the basis of a more extended and unmeasured attack; and the writer endeavoured to turn the whole into ridicule and contempt. To this, a reply, in many respects satisfactory, appeared in the Fife Herald, June 24, 1830; where the attack in the Christian Instructor is ascribed, whether correctly or not I cannot say, to Dr. Andrew Thomson.

My attention having been thus drawn to the subject of controversy, I entered into an investigation of it, as accurately as my knowledge and

means of information enabled me ; and the result of the examination fully satisfied my mind as to the necessity and propriety of the measure. Hearing that an unfavourable impression had been produced on several valued friends of the British and Foreign Bible Society, by the charges advanced in the *Christian Instructor*, I felt it a duty which I owed to that Society and the religious public to make known the facts of the case, with the hope that that which gave satisfaction to my own mind, might be equally satisfactory to that of others. In presenting the result to the public, I have endeavoured to rest every thing upon the best possible evidence to which I had access, and nothing upon my bare affirmation ; and this, I trust, will be a sufficient apology for the extended nature of the discussion, while it will yield a proportionate degree of certainty to the inferences deduced. To the candid judgment of that public I now submit my labours, with the pleasing anticipation of a favourable verdict ; praying " that the Spirit of truth may guide us into all truth," and that both our assailant and ourselves may have larger measures of that " charity which suffereth long and is kind ; which envieth not, which vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

London, September 28, 1830.

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THERE are lights and shades in every picture, and every picture has its point of view; while the light in which it is examined, and the medium through which it is seen, are of prime importance to a correct appreciation of its worth. However admirable it may be in design, or perfect in execution, if the point from which it is viewed be erroneous, or the light in which it is placed be improper, or the lens through which it is scrutinized be ill-formed or impure, it may present but a mass of undistinguished colour, or an unnatural or distorted representation of the objects it was intended to pourtray. To these necessary matters every one accordingly attends, ere he presumes to criticise a painting, or attempts to pass a judgment on its merits. But this obvious and fair rule of conduct, which is clearly the dictate of common sense, is but too frequently disregarded in religion and literature. How few, on such subjects, consider it necessary to select the place where they shall take their stand, to examine the sufficiency of the light in which the object is placed, or to remove any obstructions that might mar their mental vision. The spot on which they happen to be placed is assumed to be the only position whence the object should be viewed; the light they may chance to

possess is judged to be amply sufficient, nay perfect, and correct in bearing; and their visual faculty is esteemed absolutely faultless, and the only true medium of perception. Thus self-possessed they commence the work of criticism; and, with the vehemence and assumed authority of autocrats, dogmatically decide on the merits of the subject. But, should their random position be erroneous, their light be defective, or their mental vision be clouded by prejudice or passion, the object must obviously present to their mind only a partial, distorted, or false image; and consequently, their estimation of its nature must be faulty, and their sentence on its claims unjust.

Such has been the course pursued by a writer in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, and such has been his unfortunate position relative to the Negro-English Version; which having been not only placed in a false point of view, and in an erroneous and defective light, but seen through a distorted medium, has been most unjustly condemned, and the conduct of the committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society severely arraigned. Taking his stand in Great Britain instead of in Surinam, he rests his view on the circumstances by which he is surrounded, or at best, and that only occasionally, on those existing in the West India islands, instead of on the actual state of that colony, and the peculiar condition of its inhabitants and language. Such is his position; nor is he a whit more fortunate in the choice of the light in which he surveys his subject. To say the least, it is placed in a defective and false light, mingled with much darkness; while the whole receives an unnatural shape and colouring from the obliquity and jaundiced hue of his visual organ at the contemplation of whatever is connected with the British and Foreign Bible Society. Consequently, his estimate of the nature and character of the Negro-English Version is perfectly erroneous, and his condemnation of it unjust; while his aspersions of the motives and conduct of the committee are destitute of the

slightest foundation. The truth of this statement I shall now endeavour to demonstrate, by placing the subject in its true light, and the reader and myself in a proper position; and I trust, that while surveying it in all its bearings, our mental perception may be unsullied by prejudice, and unclouded by passion. In order to effect this object, I crave the reader's patient attention while I proceed to lay before him the history of the Negro-English Version, to present him with a view of the position and history of Surinam, and to exhibit the real nature and composition of the singular language spoken by its inhabitants, derived from the most unexceptionable sources of information, and from a careful examination and analysis of the language and version. By this process, it will be abundantly manifest, that the translation was necessary and proper; and that the course pursued by the committee was correct.

A mission of the United Brethren has existed at Surinam ever since the year 1738, both among the Negro slaves and also among the free Negroes, or the Serameca and Ouca rebels. Into the language spoken by these people, a translation of the harmony of the Gospels, as used in the Moravian church, was early made; and a version of the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and part of the Revelations, was effected by the Rev. Mr. Schuman, some time previously to the year 1813, as appears from a letter of that date addressed to the Rev. C. J. Latrobe, by the Rev. Thomas Langballe, of Paramaribo. This communication having been laid before the sub-committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Oct. 12, 1813, accompanied by a personal representation upon that subject by the Rev. Mr. Hufnagel, then recently returned from Surinam, it was resolved—

“That if Mr. Langballe can furnish a translation of the New Testament, or any distinct books thereof, (i. e. by extracting the Gospels from the Harmony, as he had proposed,) in that language, it be recommended to the General Committee to print a supply for the use of the Negroes in that colony.”