

**OXFORD CHURCH TEXT  
BOOKS. THE TEXT OF  
THE NEW TESTAMENT**

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**K. LAKE**

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The Text of  
The New Testament

BY

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## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. The Object and Method of Textual Criticism,	1
II. The Apparatus Criticus of the New Testament	
—Greek mss., . . . . .	11
III. The Versions, . . . . .	22
IV. Patristic Quotations—Liturgical Evidence—	
Chapter Divisions and Stichometry, . . .	47
V. History of Modern Criticism, . . . . .	50
VI. The Western Text, . . . . .	73
APPENDIX—A. Tischendorf's System of Notation,	92
B. Summary of Greek and Latin mss.,	94
C. Books valuable for Textual Criticism,	99
INDEX, . . . . .	100



## CHAPTER I

### THE OBJECT AND METHOD OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

One of the most necessary parts of the investigations of historians is to criticise the documents on which their researches are based, in order to be certain that the text which they are using really represents the original writing of the author. This criticism is usually known as *Textual criticism*, for the obvious reason that it deals with the *text* as opposed to the subject-matter. It is less commonly termed the *Lower* as opposed to the *Higher* criticism, which deals not with the text as written by the author or editor of the document in question, but with the sources and methods used by him in making the text. Thus Higher criticism approaches the subject at a point *higher* up the stream of its existence.

The object of all textual criticism is to recover so far as possible the actual words written by the writer. But in order to do this properly the critic has to explain how each successive deviation from the original came to be currently adopted, and frequently he finds the clue enabling him to do this in the history of some later period, which gives some reason for a textual variation. In these researches it sometimes happens that the discoveries of the textualist are of great value to the historian; for the corrupt reading of some important document often explains otherwise inexplicable phenomena in the history of ideas or the conduct of a controversy.

The problem, then, which faces the textual critic is to remove from a number of manuscripts of varying date the corruptions which have crept into the text and to



## 2 THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

assign to each variation its appropriate cause, thus obtaining in the end the original pure text.

Let us assume, then, what as a matter of fact is never more than approximately the case, that the critic has at his disposal all the known mss. of a given work. He begins his work knowing nothing about the character of the mss., and from them he has to find out and reconstruct the original text. His work falls into four stages, which in practice necessarily pass imperceptibly into each other, but which in theory are distinguishable, and ought not to be confused :—

- I. *The study of each manuscript by itself, correcting obvious mistakes which are due to slips of the pen and cognate reasons, and such readings as seem clearly to be corrupt forms of other recorded readings.*
- II. *A comparison of the manuscripts to which this process has been applied, and their arrangement into groups, according to similarities of reading, the rule being followed that, speaking generally, community of error implies community of origin. This process is carried on until all the known mss. have been put into groups, each with a presumably distinct ancestor or archetype.*
- III. *These archetypes are then compared, and a provisional text is constructed out of them, the archetype of the archetypes being arrived at as closely as possible.*
- IV. This provisional text is finally subjected to the process known as *conjectural emendation*. That is, an attempt is made to explain and emend all the passages which still seem corrupt.

These four stages in the work of textual criticism call for a little fuller explanation.

I. The investigation of individual mss. and the detection of scribes' mistakes or alterations demand the knowledge and application of the laws which obtain in these matters.

The chief point to be remembered is that mistakes and corruptions are of two classes:—

1. Unintentional, due to natural error.
2. Intentional, due to a desire for improvement.

1. *Unintentional alterations.*—Many instances of this source of error are quite easy to detect and remedy; such, for example, are cases where a word or phrase is senselessly repeated twice, e.g. in the Latin of the Laudian ms. of Acts ii. 4 the scribe has written 'et repleti sunt et repleti sunt omnes spiritu sancto,' where the omission of the second 'et repleti sunt' is an obvious and certain correction.

This is technically called *ditto-graphy*; similar causes of error are *homoioteleuton*—the confusion of words ending in similar syllables; this cause often leads to the omission of a complete line of the archetype; and if many examples of it occur in the same ms., it is sometimes possible to deduce from them the length of the lines in the archetype; *haplography*—writing a word once when it ought to be repeated, e.g. κύριε for κύριε, κύριε; *itacism*—strictly a tendency to replace other vowels by *iota*, but loosely used of other vowel changes. In later Greek mss. almost any vowel seems changeable for any other, nor does the same ms. always observe the same spelling, e.g. λέγεσθαι is often spelt λέγετε; θῆλυ is written θῆλι; αἱ γυναῖκες becomes ἡ γυναῖκας, and so on.

There are many other technical phrases for similar kinds of mistakes, most of which explain themselves. The important thing is that they classify to some extent the slips of the pen and misspellings of scribes. A slightly different form of error is where the scribe seems to have preserved the right order of letters, but produced the wrong word from them, e.g. in Col. ii. 18 we read δ ἐώρακεν ἐμβρατεύων, where a possible explanation of an otherwise hopeless passage is that an early scribe thus divided up αἰωρακενεμβρατεύων (altering ι to ε) instead of thus, αἰώρα κενεμβρατεύων, being deceived by the rarity of the word κενεμβρατεύων. It must, of course, be remembered that the earliest mss. have no accents or breathings.

A similar form of mistake is due to misunderstanding

#### 4 THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

of contracted words. A possible example of this is the curious reading in Matt. xxvii. 16, *τίνα θέλετε ἀπὸ τῶν δύο ἀπολύσω ὑμῖν Ἰησοῦν Βαραββᾶν ἢ Ἰησοῦν κ.τ.λ.* The usual way of writing Ἰησοῦν is *Ἰ*, i.e. the first and last letters. It is suggested that the origin of the reading is that an early scribe was guilty of dittography, and wrote *Ἰησοῦν* for *ὑμῖν*, but saw his mistake and deleted the second *ω* by dots—*ι̇*. This was taken for a contracted word by some later reader—the more easily because Βαραββᾶν seems to be a patronymic. (Such an explanation is, of course, double-edged; the omission of *ω* can be explained equally well as an example of haplography.)

It is very important to collect the examples of this kind of mistake, not simply because their detection is a first step towards the purifying of the text, but because they are an important clue to the history of the manuscript in which they occur. The more senseless the mistake, the more important it sometimes is, e.g. of Matt. xiii. 54, Cod. Sinaiticus reads *εἰς τὴν ἀντιγράριδα* for *εἰς τὴν πατριδα*, where Dr. Rendel Harris has pointed out that this is a clue to the birthplace of the ms., just as we might imagine an Oxford scribe of Shakespeare writing—

“I come to ‘Banbury’ Caesar” for ‘bury’ Caesar,

and mistakes in spelling, especially if repeated, often give a hint as to the pronunciation, and so nationality, of the scribe. For example, if a scribe of early date is found to write consistently ‘michi’ for ‘mihī,’ it is probable that he is a Spaniard.

All these forms of mistake and similar ones are fairly easy to detect, and their classification is the first thing that a critic has to do. Some of them, such as dittographs, are obvious at once, others are only recognised when several other mss. have been seen, and a roughly provisional text exists at least in the mind of the critic. It must, however, be remembered that great caution is required in deciding whether a reading is certainly corrupt or only possibly so. And the critic has always to be ready to revise his judgment. He ought always