

**A COURSE OF DEVELOPED
CRITICISM: ON PASSAGES OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT
MATERIALLY AFFECTED BY
VARIOUS READINGS**

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A course of developed criticism: on passages of the New Testament materially affected by various readings by Thomas Sheldon Green

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INTRODUCTION.

THE books of the New Testament have been no more exempt from corrupting influences on their text than other writings of antiquity; and hence has arisen the task of the critic to make, by the use of all available means, as near an approach as may be to purity; a task the importance of which may be best rated by that of the writings themselves.

This importance, however, has been strangely disregarded: in proof of which it is enough to point to laboured expositions of matter undoubtedly spurious, encounters with difficulties that exist only in corruptions, and controversial citations where the reading is so questionable as to leave only the unhappy alternative of ignorance or disingenuousness. The same thing also appears in the circumstance, that calls are being made from time to time for new or revised versions of Scripture without betraying any consciousness of the necessity of a certain preliminary to such proceedings, namely, the determination of the text to be represented in such version or revision.

The purpose of these statements is not, however, to introduce an expression of censure, but rather to specify a circumstance which might furnish a plea in excuse for the disregard that has been thus noticed. This circumstance shall now be explained.

A critical edition of the New Testament offers on its pages

two distinct things, the text itself as determined by the judgment of the critic, or, at least, furnished with indications of the form which he thinks it ought to take, and a register of the authorities on which, in each several case, his decision has been made to rest, as well as of variations in general. The latter is presented in a shape necessarily compressed, and apt to offer to an untrained eye an appearance of intricacy and confusion. Of the steps of reasoning connecting the resulting text with the cited authorities there are no intimations, except such as may be gathered from a few prefatory statements of general principles which the critic has thought proper to adopt; with which, too, an occasional decision may have at least the appearance of inconsistency.

The tendency of these circumstances is unfavourable to an interest in the important subject, and they may often have issued in an entire disregard of it. The present attempt has been made in the hope of meeting in some degree this difficulty, by offering complete discussions of places affected by such variations as are material to the careful reader and the interpreter of the New Testament. Not that any variation is in itself immaterial: to the critic each has its significance, and its consideration makes its contribution to the perfection of his art.

The reader is merely supposed to be acquainted with the age and character of the principal MSS., and the notation by which they are conventionally cited, and with the history of the ancient versions.* In this place, accordingly, it will be sufficient to specify the various kinds of corruption to which the text has been exposed, and afterwards to notice some preliminary points of importance.

* The necessary information may be found in several quarters, especially in the prefatory matter of various critical editions; among which Tischendorf's may be particularly named.

The MSS. of the Old Latin will be cited according to the notation used by Tischendorf. This title is here employed comprehensively for the Antehieronymian Latin in both its phases, the African and the Italic. Its

The work of transcription can never be altogether exempt from the corruptions of mere accident, arising from the wanderings of the eye and the slips of the pen. A place affected by various readings should, therefore, be carefully scanned for the detection of any probable mechanical cause of such mischief, anything likely to betray a copyist into unwitting mistakes. Of the endless shapes which these might take two kinds may be especially mentioned, the interchange of words slightly differing in form, and omissions of words and clauses by oversight.

Another process of corruption is the encroachment on the text of marginal or interlineary matter, which may, for the sake of convenience, be comprehended under the term glossarial. First, there is the gloss properly so called, namely, a term serving to furnish an explanation or attach a precise interpretation to one in the text. These may either become simply intrusive and produce accretion, or may be substituted for the genuine reading and exhibit usurpation. Again, this class embraces supplements of various extent, where the text may have been elliptical or seemed defective: these are a great source of accretion. There is, also, other matter coming under this head, in the way of illustration or comment, ready materials of accretion.* It is scarcely necessary to observe, that the writings of the New Testament

importance can hardly be overrated: its rival in this respect would be the Peshito, if the text of this latter were settled by the aid of copies of like antiquity and value with the imperfect Nitrian MS. of the Gospels. Whenever the Peshito is cited from this copy, the citation will be distinguished by the letter N. The writer is indebted for the means of doing it to the kindness of Dr. Tregelles, whose undaunted zeal and unwearied labours in the cause of sacred criticism are beyond all praise.

* Of the corrupting process thus described the reader may furnish himself with abundant illustration, unattended by alarm or prejudice, by comparing the text of some of the more familiar orations of Demosthenes, as settled by recent criticism, with its previous form. The Third Philippic may be named as affording a good specimen in this way.

Accretion is not merely a corruption of a writer's matter, but disguises the finer features of his manner, as much as smoke, dirt, and daubing, the touches and colouring of an old master.

would from their peculiar character especially gather around them matter of this kind. Here it is the business of the critic to exercise discernment and reasoning on the facts which research has in each case brought forward, in order to discriminate the incrustation from the original substance, and the germ amidst the motley growth that overlies it.

Corruption may also be the work of wilful tamperings; and what is possible must not be left out of sight by the critic. Whether such a process has been perpetrated on the text of the New Testament, so as to leave still existing traces, is a question that must not be passed over without notice. Charges of falsification have been boldly launched by ecclesiastical writers; but, when unattended with specification of particulars in evidence, they must be allowed to have no more weight than is due to polemical criminations in general; and such particulars as have been actually advanced, will on due examination be found to leave at the most but a slender ground for the belief, that much mischief was effected in that way. Besides, a disposition to falsify, wherever it might exist, would hardly be able to free itself from the restraining consciousness, that the attempt would be a bootless one. The idea, therefore, of falsification can only be admitted into the realm of criticism under check of such considerations as these. Least of all should a ready recourse be had to wilful suppression to account for the absence of any portion of text from important documents. There is reason, however, to admit the existence of meddlings of a less serious kind, in the way of improvements in grammar and expression: but among a group of rival readings there can in general be no great difficulty in distinguishing that which bears the stamp of such interference. It is also a fair supposition, that copyists would make mischief by arbitrary and inconsiderate corrections of imaginary mistakes, and of some, too, which were real.

Lastly, there is a particular form of corruption, to which other

writings might be occasionally open, but to which the volume of the New Testament, and more especially the Gospels, was exposed in a manner peculiar to itself, namely, the process by which passages originally possessing some resemblance in matter and language would be brought into a still closer agreement, and which may be properly styled assimilation. By this term, however, it is not intended to imply of necessity an immediate interference with the text, with the direct purpose of producing a closer conformity than originally existed. In undoubted cases there are circumstances to be observed scarcely compatible with a deliberate operation of that kind; while, on the other hand, appearances in general may be accounted for on the supposition, that the matter which, when introduced into the text, had an assimilative effect, was, in the first instance, simply marginal or interlinear.

The work to which the critic of the New Testament is called, must consist to a considerable extent in disentangling the text from intrusive and usurping matter, having its origin in the margin; in detaching accretions, and replacing whatever may have been dislodged by a spurious rival: and with this view one leading principle must be especially noticed.

Corruption of this particular kind must be the work of time, because the growth of such matter itself would be gradual, and its sliding into the text by the agency of reckless, ill-taught, and foolish hands, and through the general propensity of copyists for amplification, would be likewise gradual: the evil, too, unchecked in its earlier stages by due watchfulness or control, would go on spreading with the advance of time. It follows of necessity from this, that the more ancient documents will in general exhibit a greater approach to purity in this particular respect than those of later date, and, as a practical consequence, that the adverse testimony of but a few witnesses of high antiquity, in the case