

THE REVISERS & THE GREEK TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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CHARLES JOHN ELLICOTT

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GREEK TEXT OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT**

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AND

THE GREEK TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY

TWO MEMBERS

OF

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THE REVISERS AND THE GREEK TEXT
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

A BOLD assault has been made in recent numbers of the *Quarterly Review* upon the whole fabric of criticism which has been built up during the last fifty years by the patient labour of successive editors of the Greek Testament. The subject of the articles to which we refer is the Revised Version; their undisguised purpose is to destroy the credit of that Version. The first article is entitled 'The New Greek Text,' the second 'The New English Version:' in both, however, textual questions are discussed, in the first textual questions only. By the 'New Greek Text' the Reviewer must be taken to mean the choice of readings made by the Revisers, as they did not construct, or undertake to construct, a continuous and complete Greek text. This 'New Greek Text' (for we will not insist on a verbal question) he pronounces 'entirely undeserving of confidence.' He assails with especial vehemence Dr. Westcott and Dr. Hort, whom he represents as the chief guides of the Revisers in this department. He condemns in the strongest terms the edition of the Greek Testament¹ which was published last year by these two Professors:—a work, we

Recl. m. 11-15 = 39

¹ The New Testament in the original Greek—the text revised by Brooke Foss Westcott, D.D., and Fenton John Anthony Hort, D.D. Cambridge and London: Macmillan and Co. 1881.

must observe, wholly independent of the Revision in its inception and in its execution. He does not hesitate to stigmatise the text printed in that edition as 'a text demonstrably more remote from the Evangelic verity than any which has ever yet seen the light.' The Professors need no defender. An elaborate statement of their case is contained in the second volume of their Greek Testament, which was published before the Reviewer came into the field, although it appeared two or three months later than the first volume. The Reviewer censures their text: in neither article has he attempted a serious examination of the arguments which they allege in its support.

We do not intend to reply to these articles in detail. To follow the Reviewer through his criticisms, and to show how often they rest ultimately (whether aimed at the 'New Greek Text' or at the 'New English Version') upon the notion that it is little else than sacrilege to impugn the tradition of the last three hundred years, would be a weary and unprofitable task. There is something, moreover, in his tone which makes controversy with him difficult. Silence is the best reply to flouts and gibes. But the questions which are connected with the Greek text of the New Testament are so important, and lie so far out of the track of the ordinary reader, that we cannot allow the Reviewer's observations upon this subject to remain wholly unanswered.

First of all, we desire to call attention to the fact which we mentioned at the outset. The Reviewer's attack is not confined to positions occupied exclusively by the Revisers. His fire includes in its range a multitude of other scholars also. Some of these he censures by name; others he does not name at all, or names as though he believed them to share his

own opinions. A single illustration of this statement will suffice. The Reviewer has devoted five pages to the famous diversity of reading in 1 Tim. iii. 16. He employs his heaviest artillery against the reading ($\delta\varsigma \epsilon\phiανερωθη$) which the Revisers have adopted in this verse. It would be natural to suppose that here at all events the Revisers (with the two Cambridge Professors) stand alone. In point of fact, however, the same reading is found in the critical editions of Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Tregelles; it was adopted by the late Dean Alford in his Greek Testament; it was adopted by Bishop Ellicott in his Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, after a personal inspection of the Alexandrian manuscript; it was adopted by the Bishop of Lincoln (then Canon Wordsworth) in his Commentary; it was adopted again by the Bishop of London in a volume of the Speaker's Commentary which appeared last year. Nor is it matter of surprise that the Reviewer's projectiles should strike down friends and foes alike. While he denounces by name Lachmann and Tischendorf and Tregelles, and describes the ancient authorities which they deemed of most importance as 'a little handful of suspicious documents,' it would be difficult to find a recent English commentator of any considerable reputation who has not been influenced, more or less consistently, by one or other of these three editors, or by the evidence which they have brought forward.

We have called these articles an assault on the criticism of the last fifty years. We might call them without injustice an assault on two centuries of criticism. If the Reviewer is right, Mill and Bentley at the beginning of the eighteenth century (not to mention any of the critics who came after them) were in

pursuit of an *ignis fatuus*. Mill, the founder (so far as the Greek Testament is concerned) of textual criticism, did not construct a new text himself, but provided materials for the use of others. It was his hope, as he tells us¹ in his Prolegomena, that the large stock of evidence which he had accumulated and had placed at the foot of his pages would enable those who used his book to see without difficulty what was the genuine reading of the Sacred Text in almost every passage. Bentley proposed to construct a new Greek text which should be founded exclusively on the most ancient documents then accessible. The plan which he sketched was the very plan which Lachmann carried out in the present century with better materials than Bentley could have obtained. According to the Reviewer there was no room for such hopes or such an ambition. Mill and Bentley had in their hands a text—the *Textus Receptus*—which, though not absolutely perfect, needed at all events but little emendation.

Our concern, however, is not so much with the Reviewer as with his readers. The main task which we propose to ourselves is twofold:—first to supply accurate information, in a popular form, concerning the Greek text of the New Testament; secondly to establish, by means of the information so supplied, the soundness of the principles on which the Revisers have acted in their choice of readings, and by consequence the importance of the 'New Greek Text' (as the Reviewer calls it) of which the Revised Version is a translation. For a full and plain exhibition of this 'New Greek Text' we must refer our readers to the Greek Testaments edited for the University Presses

¹ Η ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ. Novum Testamentum Studio et Labore Joannis Millii. Oxonii, MDCCVII. Prol. p. clxvii b.

by Archdeacon Palmer at Oxford¹ and Dr. Scrivener at Cambridge².

I. In reference to the first part of this task, it is absolutely necessary to begin with what is simple and easily understood, and thence to pass onward to the more difficult questions which will present themselves at each successive stage of our progress. Textual criticism, it must not be disguised, has become highly technical and intricate, and it is impossible for any one to discuss such a subject properly without a considerable amount of carefully-digested knowledge as to the facts and details which have been slowly and laboriously ascertained during the last fifty years.

1. We begin then with a broad question in which every intelligent Christian reader must needs feel himself especially interested. What is the nature and literary history of that Greek text which presumably underlies our Authorised Version, and which is popularly known by the name of the Received Text? What is that text, and whence was it derived? When this question has been answered, we will proceed to consider what, by the nature of the case, would seem to be its critical value, or, in other words, how near it may be considered to approach to the original documents traced, or dictated, by Evangelists and Apostles. Those original documents it will be convenient to designate by a single term: we will henceforth entitle them the Original Text or Sacred Autograph.

¹ Η ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ. The Greek Testament with the Readings adopted by the Revisers of the Authorised Version. Oxford: at the Clarendon Press. 1881.

² The New Testament in the original Greek according to the Text followed in the Authorised Version, together with the Variations adopted in the Revised Version. Edited for the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press by F. H. A. Scrivener, M.A., D.C.L., LL.D., Prebendary of Exeter and Vicar of Hendon. Cambridge: at the University Press. 1881.