

**SUGGESTIONS RESPECTING THE NEGLECT OF  
THE HEBREW LANGUAGE AS A  
QUALIFICATION FOR HOLY ORDERS:  
RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED TO EXAMINING  
CHAPLAINS, TO THE CLERGY AT LARGE, AND  
TO CANDIDATES FOR ORDINATION**

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Suggestions respecting the neglect of the Hebrew language as a qualification for holy orders: respectfully addressed to examining chaplains, to the clergy at large, and to candidates for ordination by Richard William Jelf

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BY

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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WHILST these pages were preparing for the press, I accidentally met with Bishop, Mant's publication entitled "The Clergyman's Obligations considered,"—a work which every Clergyman ought to procure. I gladly seize the opportunity of strengthening my own observations by the authority of a Prelate so universally revered.

"An acquaintance with the original language of the Scriptures of the *Old Testament*, is much less generally prevalent.—I lament that it is so, and I think it much to be desired that Hebrew should form a necessary part of the course of education in our Universities, and a regular branch of examination of candidates for the ministry of the Church."  
—Page 265.



SUGGESTIONS  
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THE majority of my clerical brethren will, I presume, be ready to admit, that a very general ignorance, even of the elements of the Hebrew language, prevails amongst the great body of the English Clergy. In the pages which follow then I shall *assume* this as a fact. My own professional experience, joined to much inquiry, convinces me, not only that the Hebrew language is neglected, but that a remarkable indifference prevails upon the subject. The English Clergy indeed, as a body, never neglect an acknowledged duty : the ignorance of Hebrew, therefore, can only have proceeded from inadequate conceptions of the importance and necessity of the acquirement.

For myself, I candidly confess, that I was led to



the consideration of the subject here treated of by my uneasy reflections on the erroneous opinions with respect to the study of Hebrew once entertained by myself and my contemporaries. With some exceptions, the great body of well-disposed and able young men around me, candidates, like myself, for holy orders, appeared to regard Hebrew as a possible subject of future curiosity, not as one of the great preliminary steps towards the attainment of theological learning. Our preparations were of course made in reference to the examinations which we expected previously to our ordinations; and since, at the time of which I speak, not a question was put to us, bearing, in the most remote degree, upon the language of the Old Testament, we saw no necessity for providing ourselves with a qualification, to which our superiors themselves appeared to attach so little value. The tutors also of many of us, the guides of our youth in all other intellectual pursuits, if they recommended this study to us at all, recommended it as an optional pursuit for those who had leisure and inclination. It is matter, therefore, rather for regret than for surprise, that, with this authoritative disregard of the sacred language, it was the general practice amongst candidates for ordination, to approach the examination both for deacon's and priest's orders, to devote themselves solemnly to the study of God's Word, to take authority from the Bishop to read and expound the volume of the Holy Scriptures, without knowing one letter of the

Hebrew alphabet ; literally in ignorance of every jot and tittle of the language of that law, which is not to pass away till all be fulfilled.

It may be confidently asserted too, (although the extent of the mischief has varied according to the practice of the examinations adopted in different dioceses,) that, year after year, both before and since the period here alluded to, multitudes have entered the Church in exactly similar ignorance. I am not speaking of the idle or of the thoughtless, but of the great body of respectable and able men, —men who entered upon their profession with the deepest sense of their intellectual as well as of their spiritual responsibilities,—men who are at this moment, in all things which they perceive to be their duty, adorning the doctrine of God.

Now I submit, that, if these same individuals had been duly trained, duly examined, or timely warned; nay, if even a remonstrance, with no higher pretensions than these pages possess, had fallen into their hands, it is next to certain, that many more of Christ's soldiers would be now waging war against the powers of infidelity and darkness, in the intellectual as well as the moral "whole-armour of God;" not, as at present, with one edge of the two-edged sword of the Scriptures blunted and debased.

How it happens that the Church of England, of all Churches, should deserve this reproach, it is not easy to discover. It surely might have been expected from her, as the purest of Protestant Churches, that she would have been the first to

trim and hand down the lamp, which lighted the way to the Reformation. The secondary instrument, by which Papal superstitions were dispelled, was the light of sacred philology; and by Luther\*, accordingly, we find the study of *the* languages, as he emphatically calls them, enjoined in all the homely and forcible phraseology which distinguishes his writings. He adjures his readers, by their love of the Gospel, to hold fast to the languages. He attributes to Satan himself the depreciation of Greek and Hebrew, which had been the great obstacle to the Reformation in cloisters and schools; and he solemnly warns the civil authorities of the consequences of a relapse into ignorance. Advice

\* "So lieb nun als uns das Evangelium ist, so hart lasst uns über den Sprachen halten."—*Luth. Werke*. ii. p. 458. 6. (in his "*Exhortation to all the Magistrates in Germany to erect and support Christian Schools.*") Again, *ibid.* p. 460, "Wo die Sprachen sind, da gehet es frisch und stark, und wird die Schrift durchtrieben, und findet sich der Glaube immer neu, durch andere und über andere Wort und Werck:" and still more forcibly, "Man siehet nicht viel, dass der Teufel dieselben (Griechische und Hebreische Sprache), hätte lassen durch die hohen Schulen und Clöster aufkommen, ja sie haben allezeit aufs höchste darwieder getobt und toben auch noch. Denn der Teufel roch den Braten wol, wo die Sprachen herfür kämen, würde sein Reich ein Fach gewinnen, das er nicht könnte leicht wieder zustoßfen. Weil er nun nicht hat mügen wehren, dass sie herfür kämen, dencket er doch sie nun also schmal zu halten, dass sie von ihnen selbst wieder sollen vergehen und fallen. Es ist ihm nicht ein lieber Gast damit ins Haus kommen, darumb wil er ihn auch also speisen, dass er nicht lange solle bleiben. Diesen bösen Tück des Teufels sehen unser gar wenig, lieben Herren."—*Luth.* ii. p. 458. a.