

**PARONOMASIA AND  
KINDRED PHENOMENA  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.  
A DISSERTATION**

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Paronomasia and kindred phenomena in the New Testament. A dissertation by Elbert Russell

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A DISSERTATION**



The University of Chicago

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**PARONOMASIA AND KINDRED  
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NEW TESTAMENT**

**A DISSERTATION**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
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BY

**ELBERT RUSSELL**

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## PARONOMASIA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

### 1.

#### INTRODUCTION.

**P**RIMITIVE men and the children of civilized men use words not merely as signs of ideas but also as playthings, like rattles and tin pans, to make rhythmical noises with or, like blocks, to build into fantastic sound structures. This delight in sound combinations lingers on into our later and maturer language: in poetry as a rhythmical accompaniment of thought; in both prose and verse to give tone color to ideas, to lend liveliness or emphasis to an otherwise uneventful flow of words, to sharpen a contrast or to point a paradox.

This dissertation is the result of an investigation into the extent to which the diction of the New Testament writers has been influenced or determined by similarity in the sound of words used in close proximity. It includes in its scope all cases in the New Testament where the rhetorical force or effectiveness of a passage has been affected by such sound resemblances.

Within its limited field, the investigation throws light on the literary character of the various New Testament writings; on their relationship to the Old Testament, and to classical and contemporary Greek writings. It also makes some slight contribution toward the solution of the problems of the authorship and the mutual relations of certain sections of the New Testament.

In this study Westcott and Hort's text of the Greek New Testament has been used, although in the lists of the various phenomena the order of the books in the English Bible is followed.

#### DEFINITION.

The word paronomasia is used by different authors with a varying connotation. Blass in his "Grammar of New Testa-

ment Greek" restricts it to "the recurrence of the same word or word-stem in close proximity". For the resemblance in sound between different contiguous words he uses the word *parechesis*. According to Winer (*Grammar of New Testament Greek*), *paronomasia* consists in the combination of like-sounding words. Closely akin to it is play on words, which "differs from it in having respect to the meaning of words as well as to their similarity in sound." Casanowicz in his "*Paronomasia in the Old Testament*" includes in *paronomasia* all figures which depend on similarity of sound, including alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and play on words; but from the play on words, which he calls *paronomasia proper*, he excludes words derived from the same root unless different in meaning. According to his usage, play on words combines similarity of sound with dissimilarity of meaning.

It appears that in its widest connotation the term *paronomasia* includes all cases where resemblances in sound are used to give literary effect,—to lend color or liveliness to a passage or to emphasize the thought. It is in this broad sense, which is allowed by the definition of the *Standard Dictionary*, that the word is used here.

#### LITERARY VALUE.

*Paronomasia* adds to the literary effectiveness of a passage in a variety of ways. It may give variety and liveliness through alliteration or the irregular rhyme of *homoeoteleuton*. It may add a gnomic effect through alliteration or the striking resemblance of neighboring words. It may give the effect of paradox through the sound-similarities of different words or through different meanings of the same word. It may give emphasis through a playful or apparent fallacy of the ambiguous middle. It may be used to enhance an antithesis; or to emphasize a single idea by the accumulation or repetition of like-sounding words having the same meaning.

In some cases it is difficult to determine whether *paronomasias* are accidental, or natural and unstudied, or the result of conscious striving after literary effect on the part of the writer. In the absence of other decisive considerations, we may regard them as used, consciously or unconsciously, for literary effect, when the combination is of frequent occurrence, so as to have acquired the character of a formula; when un-

usual or rare words are used to secure similarity of sound, or when words are used in unusual order or combinations to bring like-sounding words close together; when there is a play on the sound or meaning of a proper name; and especially, when the style of the passage is elevated, rhetorical, or impassioned, and figures of speech abound in the context.

#### CLASSIFICATION.

For a full discussion of paronomasia in general the reader is referred to Part I of Dr. Casanowicz' "Paronomasia in the Old Testament". This paper is confined to a presentation and discussion of the varieties and instances of such phenomena in the Greek New Testament.

They fall into two general groups: (1) Those which are based on similarity of sound regardless of meaning; called *parechesis* by Blass, and by others *paronomasia* proper; and (2) Those which have regard to the meaning of like-sounding words in the same context, as well as to their sound. These are often called *play on words*, and sometimes *paronomasia* proper.

A third group is often taken into consideration, which is composed of cognates, or words formed from the same stem or root used in the same general sense in the same context. The use of such cognate forms belongs rather to the structure and genius of the language than to the choice of the writer; though there is room in so rich a language as the Greek for a writer to gratify his taste in using or avoiding the close repetition of them. (See Heb. 11: 3.)

The frequent occurrence of such cognates does affect appreciably the sound of a passage. To say "play a play" produces a different effect from saying "play a game", even though they may mean the same thing. A careful investigation of the use of them in the New Testament writings, shows that, except in a few passages, they have no literary significance.

#### OUTLINE.

The phenomena treated are grouped and treated according to this outline:

- I. *Parechesis*: Like-sounding words used in close proximity without regard to meaning.
  - (a) Alliteration and assonance.
  - (b) *Homoeoteleuton*.