

THE REVISED VERSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.¹

ON the 20th of May last, the curiosity of the English-speaking people as to the final result of the revision of the New Testament, raised to a high tension by delay, received its gratification. Thomas Nelson & Sons, on behalf of the English University presses, began at one o'clock A. M. the promised sale. In four days, amidst scenes of unwonted excitement, sale was made of four hundred thousand copies. The ocean telegraph states that one million copies were sold in London in about the same time. This enormous sale, with the universal discussion of the revision in the newspaper press, is referred to as a splendid evidence of the vitality of the Christian religion in our day, and of the power of the Bible. Of course the revision of no other book could excite such attention. But the popular furor is rather an evidence of that Athenian trait, fostered by the prurient civilization of Britain and America, the craving "either to tell or to hear some new thing." It remains to be seen whether, after curiosity is sated, the Scriptures will be more read or more obeyed than before. To make this result permanent, something more is required than a literary enterprise—the power of the Holy Ghost.

Seemliness requires us to take note of it as a literary event. Our purpose is not detailed criticism; of this even village weeklies give specimens. We only aim to signalize some facts concerning the revision for the guidance of intelligent readers.

1. The work originated eleven years ago, in an action of the "Convocation of Canterbury" (the Episcopal Convention of that Province of the Anglican Church.) This raised an Old Testament and a New Testament committee of revision. The latter is the one with which alone we now have to do. It contained twenty-five members, with Ellicott, Bishop of Gloucester, as chairman, of whom nineteen were Episcopal dignitaries and six

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“Dissenters.” Afterwards it was judged proper to secure American coöperation. To this end, Dr. Philip Schaff, of the Union (Presbyterian) Seminary in New York city, was invited to London; and, on conference with the British committee, was authorized to select an American committee to examine the work of the British, and report and exchange criticism. Dr. Schaff selected some nineteen or twenty divines in his corner of the country, representing the Congregational, Northern Methodist, Immersionist, Northern Presbyterian, Episcopal, Unitarian, and Quaker sects. These continued the species of coöperation allowed them until the completion of the work.

It is obvious from this statement that, effectively, the revision is not an American, but exclusively a British work. Only a part of the American churches, and a very small section of the country, were represented in the work, even in this nominal manner. *Second*, these local representatives seem to have been selected by Dr. Schaff doubtless on conference with other gentlemen, but by no ecclesiastical authority, and by no standard but that of convenience and his estimate of their scholarship. And *third*, these so-called American revisers were not allowed coördinate authority with the British committee. It appears that they were allowed to suggest criticisms, which the British committee rejected or adopted as to them seemed good, while the American committee had no power to reject the British decisions. Consequently, a large part—perhaps the most, if secrets were divulged—of the suggestions of the Americans appear only in the form of an appendix.

2. A revision naturally falls into two parts: the more correct ascertainment of the text to be translated, and an amendment of the translation itself. The committees have taken in hand the first of these tasks with vigor. They give us a text which boldly departs from the *textus receptus*. The salient trait of their work here is, that, as to nearly all the important and contested “various readings,” whose genuineness has been and is subject of debate among competent biblical critics, the committees have arrogated to themselves the prerogative of deciding, and deciding on the side of innovation. Two of these contested passages have, indeed, been allowed to stand: the history of the woman taken in adultery, John viii. 2-11; and the closing words of Mark’s Gospel, xvi. 9-20. But of the other readings which the scholar re-

cognizes as classical and undecided topics of debate among critics, the most are decided for the innovators: the omission of the doxology from the Lord's Prayer, Matt. vi. 13; the excision of Philip's answer to the Ethiopian, Acts viii. 37; the suppression of the word "God," Acts xx. 28, where the received text teaches us that the church was purchased with divine blood; the suppression of "God," in 1 Tim. iii. 16, "God manifested in the flesh;" the excision of the three witnesses in heaven, 1 John v. 7; the suppression of the angel's agency at the pool of Bethesda, John v. 4, etc.

This journal, foreseeing the danger of too rash an innovation in our received text, foreshadowed by the spirit of the revisers, endeavored to sound a note of caution in its number for April, 1871, in a discussion of *Tischendorf's Sinai Codex*. It was there shown that the canons of excision, on which the school of critics now in fashion proceed with unquestioning confidence, are neither demonstrated nor safe; that the ages assigned to the leading uncial manuscripts were rather surmises than proofs; that the general maxim, an uncial is more ancient than a cursive, was not certain; that the rule for valuing the internal evidence in favor of or against a reading, "the difficult reading has the preference," is unfounded and deceptive; that the clear internal marks of sectarian tamperings, in the case of the important doctrinal various readings, were not duly pondered. The fears there expressed have been verified. Decisions have been made against the received text, in cases where the critical debate is still undecided; and that, in cases of cardinal importance. Nor are the grounds of these innovations always stated with candor in their justificatory publications. For instance, in 1 Tim. iii. 16, the $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ is changed into $\theta\varsigma$, thus suppressing the name of God in the text, "Great is the mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the flesh,*" etc., and making it "mystery of godliness who was manifest in the flesh," etc. But our revisers, after changing the Greek, do not translate as we have just written, as their own change should have required; they paraphrase, "mystery of godliness: *he who was manifest,*" etc. This is but an expedient, unwarranted by their own preferred text, to cover from the readers' eyes the insuperable internal evidence against reading the relative $\delta\varsigma$ instead of $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$; that for the relative there is no antecedent in the passage. So they intrude an antecedent! Yet this does not give

them, still, a tenable sense; for Christ is never called by Paul the mystery, or blessed secret, of godliness. It is the doctrine about Christ which he always so calls. Nor are the defenders of this innovation even candid in their statement as to the testimony of the MSS., when they say, no old uncial has *θεός*. The Alexandrine indisputably has it now. True, the bar in the circle, which differentiates the *theta* from the *omicron*, is said to have the appearance of fresher ink; yet it is confessedly an open question, at least, whether the fresher ink may not be the mere replacement of the original ink of the bar, which was found to have scaled off (a thing which is known to happen to old parchment MSS). This is every way most probable; so that the *prima facie* evidence of the Alexandrine MS. is for *θεός*.

From this specimen the reader may judge on the principle, *ex pede Herculem*, how the text is handled. But there is a graver general objection against the authority arrogated to decide what is the true text, against that hitherto accepted by the church; it is an authority concerning the correctness or incorrectness of whose exercise the Revised Testament provides no data for the reader's judgment. But the biblical critics who guided the revisers to make these innovations in the text are not popes. The rest of us Bible readers have not lost the right of private judgment as to this or any other point. If the Greek Testament, which the church has seen fit to use, is to be changed, we are entitled to have the supposed (critical) grounds for that change spread before us for our judgment. The Revised Testament condescends to give no such grounds. Is it said, such critical matter would be a wholly unsuitable annex to a popular Bible? Just so; and therefore the power arrogated in this matter is wholly unsuitable for the revisers. There is an essential difference between this exercise of power and that of amending a translation; that, in the latter case, the data of comparison and judgment go along with the amendment, at least to every educated man in the church who has in his hand a received Greek text. That text is the umpire, and the reader can compare with it the old translation and the new, and judge for himself which is the more faithful. But upon the plan pursued by these revisers *the church will have no textus receptus* of the Greek; *i. e.*, unless she be willing to accept it on the *ipse dixit* of the revisers. This is in substance the objection made by the most learned and conservative critics of our

Southern Church against the plan of *Lachmann's* text, a plan thoroughly revolutionary in its tendency, however executed in his particular hands, a plan of which these revisers seem especially enamored.

Once more: This over-innovating spirit as to the *textus receptus* is manifested by the unduly depreciating strain in which the revisers now represent its merits. The members of the last Assembly will recall a notable instance of this tone in the remarks made before it in commendation of the revisers' work. We were told that the *textus receptus* was virtually the text settled in Erasmus's latest edition, and that it was now known that he had collated but five or six cursive MSS. of no antiquity and of small authority. Such was the whole showing made for it! And every member of the Assembly can bear witness that the popular impression made and apparently designed was, that our received text had all along been almost worthless as authority, and only right, as it were, by chance! Now here we charge a *suppressio veri*. First, it was not stated that the subsequent editors, as Stephens, who matured the *textus receptus*, had the advantage of collating the great *Complutensian Polyglot*, edited at royal expense, under the auspices of the first scholar of his age, Cardinal Ximenes, from the collation of Spanish and Vatican MSS., and therefore checking or confirming the Erasmian text by independent witnesses from a different part of Christendom. Next, there was a suppression of this all-important fact, that since the development of the vast critical *apparatus* of our century, the *textus receptus*, whether by good fortune or by the critical sagacity of Erasmus or by the superintendence of a good providence, *has been found to stand the ordeal amazingly well*, has been accredited instead of discredited by the critical texts. So slight were the modifications in its readings clearly determined by the vast collations made by the critics of the immediately preceding generation (collations embracing every one of the boasted uncials, except the Sinai MS.), that of all the important various readings only one (1 John v. 7,) has been given up to excision by a unanimous consent of competent critics. Now, the state of facts is this: the question is, of the correctness of the *textus receptus*. The standard of comparison is the result of the most prudent and extensive collations. The evidence of correctness is simply in the agreement of that result with the received text. If there is that

general agreement, as there is, the question of time, whether the text was printed before the result of the collation, does not touch the evidence. Now, our charge is, that this history of the results of the critical work of the age is suppressed in order to disparage the received text. It is well known that after Griesbach, a critic of a revolutionary temper, had issued his text, departing widely from the received one, the steady tendency of later critics, as Hahn, Scholz, etc., guided by wider collations and better critical evidence, has been to return towards the *textus receptus* on many of the readings where Griesbach had departed from it. And now it is credibly stated that Tischendorf's latest edition, as compared with his earliest, exhibits the same tendency. His first impulse, while excited by his discovery of the Sinai MS., was adverse; but the leaning of his riper experience was more favorable. He also found "the old wine was better."

We have left ourselves little time or space for the second branch of the revision—improvements in the translation itself. That a number of the changes are improvements, is undisputed. Under all the heads promised by the revisers, removal of obsolete archaisms, observance of uniformity in rendering the same words and locutions whenever they occur in the same way, conforming Hebrew names to the Old Testament spelling, correcting positive errors, and supplying omissions of King James's Version, and removing ambiguities therein, praiseworthy improvements have been made. Two only will be mentioned: Acts xx. 28, ἐπισκόπους, indisputably identified with πρεσβυτέρους, is translated "bishops," instead of "overseers." In John viii. 34; Luke xvii. 7 (margin); Titus i. 1 (margin), etc., the word "servant," which had become ambiguous, meaning in modern English no more than *employé*, is replaced by "bond-servant." This brings out the true logic of the passages.

But there are other places where greater accuracy or clearness is needed, in which the errors of the old version are perpetuated. Thus: Luke and the apostles always use the two words οἶκος and οἰκία in precise conformity with their classical meanings. Literally and materially, οἶκος is the particular dwelling or apartment occupied by the head of the family and his wife and children; tropically, it is the family proper, the parents and their own offspring. Literally, the οἰκία is the whole curtilage or premises of the proprietor; tropically, it is the whole household, including

slaves and dependents. See this accurate distinction beautifully followed in both senses (Acts xvi. 31-34). But in Acts xvi. 15 (Lydia's case), Acts xvi. 32, this distinction is wholly lost in the new version. In 1 Cor i. 16, and 1 Cor. xvi. 15, the new version exactly reverses the true meaning, making the apostle do precisely what he says he did not do. What Paul says is, that he baptized the *οἶκος*—house—family proper, of Stephanas; and that his *οἶκία* household, slaves and dependents, "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints."

In Acts xxvi. 28, 29, the old version: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," is emasculated by a paraphrase which is not really a translation: "With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian." If this has any meaning, it represents Agrippa as either ironically or resentfully charging on Paul the insolence of desiring and attempting to make him, the king, a follower of the Nazarene, by slight and trivial persuasions. Now, we submit that this is not the idiomatic force of *ἐν ὀλίγῳ*; that there is not in the tense or construction of the verb, *πειθεῖς*, trace or hint of a conditional proposition, and that the meaning is absolutely out of joint with the following verse.

In Matt. xvi. 26, the famous text on the worth of the soul is spoiled by reading, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own life?" The advocates of this change admit that *ψυχή* often unquestionably means "soul." But they appeal to that canon of interpretation that two meanings must never be ascribed to the same word in one context; and then they appeal to the twenty-fifth verse, where *ψυχή* is (in the old version as well as the new) rendered, necessarily, "life." "Whosoever will save his *life* shall lose it." etc. But we reply: the canon is not of universal force, as witness 1 Cor. iii. 17, where *φθειρεῖ* is rendered both "defile" and "destroy" in the same verse. True, the new version, even here, endeavors to carry out its rule: "If any man *destroy* the temple of God, him shall God destroy;" but it is done by outraging the context and sacrificing the apostle's true meaning. We reply again, that the rendering of *ψυχή* by "life," in Matt. xvi. 25, is not necessary. Calvin renders it by *soul* all through the passage. This is entirely tenable, and indeed gives a finer shade of meaning to our Saviour's words. And last, the rendering of *ψυχή* by "life," in the twenty-sixth verse, does not express

our Saviour's meaning. Since the full worldly prosperity, which is contrasted with redemption, implies continued life, he would not have represented the man who *lost his life* as having "gained the whole world."

But perhaps the most lamentable change is that of 2 Tim. iii. 16. There the old version correctly renders *Πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος, καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν*: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," etc. The enemies of the Bible have long sought to defraud us of this evidence of full inspiration by making it read: "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable," etc. The poisonous suggestion intended is that, among the parts of the "scripture" some are inspired and some are not. Our Bible contains fallible parts! the very doctrine of the Socinian and Rationalist. This treacherous version the revisers have gratuitously sanctioned! They have done so against the recorded testimony of their chairman, Bishop Ellicott (*Commentary* on 2 Tim.). They have done so against the clear force of the context and the Greek idiom. For there is no doubt, with the careful reader, that the *πᾶσα γραφή* are meant by Paul to be the *ἑρὰ γράμματα* of verse fifteen, which unquestionably mean the whole Old Testament Scriptures. *Second*, Paul leaves us, confessedly, to supply the copula. But it must be supplied between *γραφὴ* and *θεόπνευστος*. "Every scripture *is* inspired of God," and not between *θεόπνευστος* and *ὠφέλιμος*; for this latter construction would make the first adjective qualify the subject, "every scripture;" and the second adjective would be the predicate of the proposition. Now, it is at least more natural, that the conjunction *καὶ* should connect adjectives in a similar construction. Put the copula, as our old version does, after "scripture," and both the adjectives are predicates, and thus suitably conjoined by the conjunction. Here, again, "the old is better."

In conclusion, the revisers have evidently yielded too much to the desire for change. There is a multitude of needless emendations, of which the least that can be said is, that they are no improvements. The changes have been calculated to average two for each verse of the Gospels and Acts, and three for each verse of the Epistles and Apocalypse. Is this a revision or a new version?