

THE WESTCOTT AND HORT TEXT UNDER FIRE

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THE Convocation of Canterbury undertook in the year 1871 the revision of the version of the New Testament published in 1611. Before the Canterbury Revision saw the light in 1881, there had been repeated omens of disaster. The first was the refusal of the Northern Convocation of York to cooperate with the Southern body in this undertaking. This indicated that the Church of England was divided in opinion as to the advisability of attempting to improve the Authorized Version. The second was the invitation extended to Dr. Vance Smith, a Unitarian, to become one of the Revisers. This action aroused the suspicion that the new version would not be orthodox. After the work had been finished, Alexander Gordon boasted that many texts, such as "sending strong delusion" and "knowing the terror of the Lord," had been softened; and Dr. A. P. Peabody, in the *Andover Review*, expressed his satisfaction that no more sermons would be preached from the text, "He that believeth not shall be damned." A third unfavorable circumstance was the monopoly granted to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, which, to reimburse themselves for the twenty thousand pounds invested in the enterprise, had to sell the Revision at a prohibitive price. A fourth was the protest sent by the Bishop of St. Andrew's to each of his fellow Revisers against the admission of so many uncalled-for and unnecessary corrections. The Bishop's indignation was so intense that he refused to sign a testimonial to Bishop Ellicott, the chairman of the Company. A fifth blunder was the secret sessions. There was no attempt to conciliate the public. No samples of the work were sent out for examination and criticism. The public was compelled to receive what the Revisers thought best to give them. Sim-

ilar secrecy was maintained as to the Greek text which had been adopted. The Westcott and Hort text, which was confidentially laid before the Revisers, was not published until five days before the Revision was issued. Another suspicious circumstance was the declaration that the Apocrypha would be included in the Revision. The exclusion of the Apocrypha from all issues of the British and Foreign Bible Society had been in force for nearly fifty years. This was a reactionary move, which was sure to arouse the opposition of all who were devoted to the circulation of an unadulterated Bible. Finally, it was an unavoidable misfortune that the Revision was finished before the language used by the apostles had been interpreted by means of the mass of contemporary documents found in the papyri of Egypt.

However, the Revisers generally had great hopes that the reward of their ten years of labor would be the universal acceptance of the new version. It had been well advertised. The interest had increased, and was greatest as the day of publication drew near. Leading scholars of all Protestant denominations had taken part in the work, so that it was to be a credit to the combined scholarship of Great Britain. There had been a widespread feeling in favor of a careful revision, confined to the removal of antiquated words in the old Bible and to changes imperatively demanded by clearly proved corruption of the received Greek text. The plan for revising Luther's Bible and the issue of a complete revision of the New Testament by the American Bible Union stimulated the English to join in this widespread movement. The invitation extended to American scholars to assist in the work diffused a cordial feeling on this side of the Atlantic.

On the memorable seventeenth day of May, 1881, two million copies of the Testament had been ordered in Great Britain, and two hundred thousand more in the United States. The verdict of acquiescence, if not of approval, seemed unmistakable. Bishop Westcott exclaimed in exultation, "I feel absolutely sure of the New Version, as I

have tried every word of it." "Our aim," Bishop Ellicott declared, "has been to attain to comparative finality." "I would not have taken part," wrote Frederick Field, the Orientalist, "without the hope that the Revised Version would be accepted as a substitute for our venerable Bible. That was the only worthy aim of such an undertaking." A pamphlet appeared that predicted ultimate success for the Revision, but it was signed by the Revisers themselves.

Bishop Ellicott became impatient at the small public use of the New Version, and asserted that "it was desirable, yes, even a duty, to use it in the church services. Numbers hesitate for fear of disquieting the congregation"; but he assured all such that "its use was allowed wherever it is desired by the clergy and the people. In the great majority of churches in this diocese no forward step has been taken. This Revision is the greatest forward movement since the Reformation." He advised his clergy to get a competent guidebook to explain the meaning of the changes that had been made. Dr. Philip Schaff predicted that "millions of copies would be sold in a few years. There will be the widest possible circulation through the United States and the world. The constitution of the American Bible Society will be changed whenever the churches which support the Society adopt the Revised Version." Edward Everett Hale prophesied that within a generation it would be found in ninety-nine out of every hundred pulpits in English-speaking Christendom. He only wished that Longfellow and Tennyson had been members of the Committee. H. P. Liddon expressed the opinion that if the plain errors could be printed in the margin in separate type, the intention of the original promoters might yet be fulfilled.

Dr. Hort, in his "Introduction to the Greek Text," expressed overconfidence in his own work in these words: "It would be illusive to anticipate important changes of the text from the acquisition of new evidence. The effect of future criticism, as of future discoveries, will not be to import many fresh readings." His fellow editor, Bishop Westcott, was equally sanguine, for he referred con-

temptuously to those who had cited Dr. Scrivener as opposed to the theories of Dr. Hort. "It would be positively ridiculous," he said, "to compare the thought which Dr. Scrivener has spent on criticism with that which Dr. Hort has spent on it." His sentiment was echoed in this country by C. J. Ropes with these warning words: "He who criticises the Revised Version does so at his peril."¹

But there was one who dared the lion in his den. It was J. W. Burgon, the Dean of Chichester, who had devoted his days and his nights to the collation of MSS. of the New Testament. The very year that Dr. Hort's text was published, he sent to the *Quarterly Review* the first of three slashing articles, attacking Dr. Hort and all textual critics of the New Testament, except Dr. Scrivener. He called the text that the Revisers had used the worst ever printed. In January, 1882, Dr. Hort wrote, "Dean Burgon is supposed to have demolished us." Later he wrote, "Dr. W. F. Moulton is still uneasy about the bad impression produced by the 'Quarterly Review.' The 'Guardian' and the 'Church Quarterly' may do a good deal toward preventing the Revised Version from being damaged by Dean Burgon." Bishop Westcott, a few years later, observed that

"a reviewer is said to have killed the Revision. I can see no signs of death. Its influence is spreading silently and surely on every side. It is read publicly in some churches. It is accepted beyond my expectations, beyond the acceptance of the version of 1611, in the same time, which only came into general use after fifty years and a revolution. I regard our work with deepest satisfaction and thankfulness. I have no fear for the issue. I am content to appeal to the next generation."

Dean Farrar said that he was not surprised at the chorus of animadversion and bursts of ingratitude and abuse with which their work had been received. "I have always meant to wait until the law has authorized me to read it in church." Dr. William Sanday, of Oxford, took Dean Burgon's attack seriously. In the *Contemporary*

¹ The New Englander, vol. xlii. p. 661.

Review for 1881 he affirmed that "the newer theories of text criticism will have to do battle for their existence"; and he added in the *Expositor* of the same year, "It would have been a fortunate thing if Dr. Hort's theory could have been thrashed out before the revision had been undertaken." Referring to Dean Burgon, he said: "Not many a hand could deal such ringing blows. His scholarship is ripe, his learning great, his confidence absolute; and his style is vivacious and telling." Dean Burgon's Bishop was of opinion that the Dean's arguments had retarded, if not completely barred, the general acceptance of the Revision in the churches.

The Revisers were placed in the position of Daniel, who, before interpreting the dream, had to find it. The greater part of their time was spent in trying to *find* the lost original text of the New Testament. Origen had declared that it would be too dangerous to touch the text current in his day, for every syllable of Scripture has its work. Jerome had been afraid that "if he made the slightest correction or alteration of the text current in his day, he would be called a counterfeiter, and be guilty of sacrilege." The sixteen men who sat around the table in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey had no such scruples. They had been warned by Convocation to make as few alterations as possible, and to make no changes in the Received Text unless the evidence for them was decidedly preponderating. Nevertheless, they went on changing until they had altered the reading of the Greek text in 5,337 places, within a few hundred of those made by Westcott and Hort. Philip Schaff counted 36,191 corrections in the Revised Version, or four and a half to each verse.

The theories upon which the changes in the Greek text had been made by Westcott and Hort were condemned by Dr. Scrivener as being dogmatic. "There is little hope of the stability of their imposing structure," he said, "if its foundations have been laid on sandy ground of ingenious conjecture." The *Church Quarterly*, a friendly publication, confessed as early as 1892, "We do not say that

Dr. Hort's claims have been finally established." The *Expositor* for 1893 published an article by Dr. George Salmon, of Dublin, in which he "rebelled against the servility with which Dr. Hort's theory had been accepted, and his text taken as final. He pleaded for a suspension of judgment." Canon Cook, editor of the "Speaker's Commentary," recalled "the strong impression made by the weight of authority with which the Revised Version was supported, that the question seemed to be regarded as at last settled. Then came the tremendous onslaught by Dean Burgon, when the popular verdict was pronounced unmistakably. It is already admitted on all hands that the Revised Version is a great blunder." The Convocation of York, which had refused its coöperation in the project, now announced that "at the present time it declined to express any opinion on the result." The *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for 1896 asserted that "in less than two years after publication the unanimous verdict of Great Britain was that it was an utter failure." The General Convention of the American Episcopal Church formally refused, in 1892, to give the clergy liberty to use the Canterbury Version, and they took similar action in 1904 regarding the American edition. Even the editor of "The Life of Dr. Hort" admits that "it seems premature to say what will be the ultimate fate of his work."

The learned Dr. Field of Norwich, editor of Origen's "Hexapla," said to Dr. W. F. Moulton, "This version of ours will never do. The public will never take it." "Oh, yes, they will," Dr. Moulton replied. "Only give them time to get accustomed to it." "We now know," Dr. Field said in recalling the conversation, "who was right." In an unpublished letter to Philip Schaff, he remarked, "The mistake of the revisers was due to their isolation. They formed, as it were, an exclusive corporation. They did not sympathize with those who set them to work or with those for whom they were working. For a few weeks men held their breath and spoke in whispers. Then a storm burst forth. The fate of the Revised Version was sealed."

"It saddens me," Bishop Howe of Wakefield said, "to think that a work so eagerly anticipated and so warmly welcomed should have lost so much of popular interest and have so greatly declined in popular use."

As the years passed, the verdict of textual critics became more and more pronounced against the Westcott and Hort text. Kirsopp Lake referred to their thirty years' labor as a "splendid blunder." Jülicher, in his "Introduction," surveyed the efforts to perfect the text, and concluded that "they present no very encouraging picture. Weymouth's resultant text shows how much editors disagree among themselves. There is slight unanimity even on fundamental questions. We are further removed from the goal than ever." J. Rendell Harris, in his edition of Codex Beza, hopes that "the theories which underlie the majority of the texts published in later days will be deserted, because text critics of modern times have run ahead of their proofs. Intellectual progress was not suspended at Dr. Hort's death. Many absurd things have been said about the finality of his analysis." Eberhard Nestle¹ concludes that "if the objections to the Westcott and Hort text are valid, then the sure foundation which they seemed to have secured for the New Testament text begins to totter once more." Bernard Weiss agrees with Hastings's "Dictionary of the Bible" that no conclusion has been reached. E. D. Burton² affirms that Westcott and Hort's theory will be criticized, and the Fathers and Versions will be reworked. Rudolph Knopf agrees with the opinion of Professor Burton.³

There were two chief causes of the failure of the Canterbury Revision,—the abbreviated Greek text which was adopted, and the broken English employed in the Revision. The various theories advanced by Dr. Hort in defense of his abridgment of the Greek text have lost favor with textual critics. What he called the "Syrian recension"

¹ Herzog's Real Encyclopaedia, art. "New Testament Text."

² American Journal of Theology, 1905.

³ Göttingen Gelehrte Anzeigen, 1917.

of the text, which, as he supposed, was made at Antioch in the fourth century, became the corner stone of his system. He conjured this scheme to account for the general prevalence of the longer text after that date. But F. G. Kenyon, in his "Bible and Ancient Manuscripts," declares that "there is no historical confirmation of the Syrian revision. The Church Fathers say nothing about it. We know the names of the translators of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, but there is no mention of the name of the reviser of the Greek text in Syria." Dr. Scrivener condemned the theory as precarious and even visionary; and E. D. Burton charged that Dr. Hort "imputed too much of a deliberate intention to create a new text." No one of Dr. Hort's conclusions, a writer in Hastings's "Dictionary" declares, has aroused so much indignation.

The *bête noire* of Dr. Hort was Codex D, as the representative of what he erroneously called the "western" text, for this text was as common in Antioch as it was in Lyons and Carthage in the second century. This is attested by the Syriac as well as by the Latin version, used by Irenæus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Justin Martyr. Yet, whenever Dr. Hort could trace a reading to the Western Text, that was enough to condemn it in his eyes. Not always, for whenever the Western Text omitted a passage, he termed it a "Western non-interpolation"; and as he was obsessed against interpolations, he flew to the despised Codex D for help which he so much needed. The Vatican Text, which he favored, was very short; but he considered the omissions as non-interpolations. Later critics honor the Western Text, which he despised. E. D. Burton is confident that "there is the greatest possibility of revision of Hort's view of the Western Text." The *Church Quarterly* for 1914 notices that "criticism has moved since the days of Westcott and Hort in the direction of the partial rehabilitation of the Western Text." Theodore Zahn goes so far as to say that "if this was the general text of the second century, then it deserves the preference over our oldest manuscripts."

Later critics condemn Dr. Hort's theory of interpolations. F. G. Kenyon boldly rules out the idea that "ignorant scribes deliberately and formally made corrections as Westcott and Hort supposed." Frederick Blass, author of "A Grammar of New Testament Greek," declares that "there is not one fraudulent interpolation in ten thousand lines." Theodore Birt, author of "The Making of Ancient Books," claims that there is not a single forged line in Horace, and that no one ever tried to imitate Tacitus. A. C. Clark, author of "Recent Development of Textual Criticism," tells of a mistake made by the great philologist Madvig, who condemned as an audacious interpolation a certain reading of a manuscript of Cicero which has since been found in a papyrus. "It is dangerous," he says, "to follow the best manuscript in its omissions, for omissions are commonly due to neglect, hurry, and ignorance." R. C. Jebb calls it "rash to conjecture an interpolation where a word or phrase which, though unobjectionable, is not indispensable." Alexander Souter, author of "A Dictionary of New Testament Greek," says, "Not nearly so many glosses got into the text as was at one time supposed." It would seem, in the judgment of the new editors, Dr. Salmon says, that "any evidence is good enough to justify an omission." F. H. Chase, the Syriac scholar, declares, "I am constrained to express my doubt as to the soundness of Dr. Hort's position as to the occurrence of interpolations."

The most serious omissions advocated by Westcott and Hort were the last twelve verses of Mark, and as many more at the end of the seventh, and the beginning of the eighth, chapter of the Gospel of John. The Revisers did not dare to remove so many verses from the New Testament; but they indicated, by the use of brackets or by separations from the context, that these passages were not authentic. The closing verses in Mark are found in all the uncials but two, and in ninety-nine per cent of the cursive manuscripts. Dean Burgon wrote a volume, and Abbé Martin has since followed it with another, in de-

fense of the genuineness of this passage. Von Soden, author of a text of the New Testament, declares that "there is no finer or more concise, no brighter or more pointed, paragraph in the New Testament. There is not a superfluous word in it. It is in the style of a master." In the year 1858, when the genuineness of this passage was being discussed, Dr. Cureton published a fragment of this Gospel in Syriac. It was but a single leaf; but it was the last one, and it contained the verses in question. Dr. J. Rendell Harris¹ calls attention to the interesting fact that while the ancient Euthalian canon reckoned 1,619 lines in Mark, Westcott and Hort have but 1,592, because they omit the twenty-five lines contained in the last twelve verses of the Gospel. Frederick Blass² says of a case of this kind, "The writing is there. The first thing to do is to explain its being there. The first explanation is that it belongs there. Whoever sets this explanation aside is obliged to form a credible explanation. Nothing is credible that lies outside the usual and known course of things. There are no forgers skilful enough to imitate. No unknown authors can be devised to supply the lines." Dr. Swete, in his commentary on this Gospel, concludes that "the documentary evidence for these verses is overwhelming." Kirsopp Lake questions "whether such good work is really that of a glossator." Dr. Sanday finds traces of these verses within fifty years after the death of the last apostle. Dr. Salmon tells of thirty-eight witnesses for the passage before the year 400. The first one who called this passage in question was Eusebius, who, in answer to a correspondent's inquiries as to the best way to settle the difference between Matthew and Mark as to the hour of the resurrection of Jesus, said that Mark's account is missing in some MSS.; but he proceeds to show how the difficulty can be settled without setting Mark's account aside.

The passage in the Gospel of John concerning the

¹ *American Journal of Philology*, 1883.

² *Text Criticism in the New Testament* (1904).

woman taken in adultery was one of the regular church lessons. Jerome found it in many Latin and Greek codices, and preserved it in his Vulgate. It is found in 1,650 codices.¹ "It seems difficult to account for such a blunder as its omission," Professor Burkitt says, "except by some such accident as the loss of a leaf or two from an exemplar." Dr. Scrivener finds strong internal evidence for these verses. The scribes have been vindicated from the charge of interpolating. It is seen to be incredible that the Doxology in the Lord's Prayer, the cry of agony in the garden, and the "Father, forgive them!" on the cross, could have been invented by any one, least of all by a mechanical copyist.

Dr. Hort, to strengthen further his defense of the shorter text, adopted the group, or genealogical, method, — a method now generally called in question. By this method he arranged a vast number of documents that favor the longer text in one family group of thousands of MSS.; and over against this immense group he set up another, very small group, with only a few codices. Of this mode of procedure, Otto von Gebhardt,² editor of "Ancient Texts," says, "It is a serious error to group manuscripts, and still worse to choose a few old manuscripts, and exclude a hundred others."

Another scheme devised by Dr. Hort to justify his abbreviated text was to put forward the Vatican Codex B as the purest text, and nearest to the original autographs. This preference has been condemned by later critics. B omits 2,877 words in the four Gospels. Tischendorf admitted the great viciousity of Aleph, the MS. which he discovered at Mount Sinai, but he charged B with universal viciousity. G. A. Howlett³ asks, "Is it safe to base a text almost entirely on B and Aleph?" Dr. Sanday⁴ says, "Evidently B and Aleph, with two or more uncials, have

¹ Göttingen Gelehrte Anzeigen, 1917, p. 408.

² Theologische Literaturzeitung, 1878.

³ Dublin Review, 1898.

⁴ Expositor, 1881.

been treated as all but decisive." Jülicher, in his "Introduction," thinks it uncertain whether we may venture to speak of B as a neutral text. E. D. Burton says, "More than one scholar has disputed the distinction which Dr. Hort makes between the neutral and the Alexandrian texts." Frederick Blass¹ complains because such confidence "is placed in B, that the opposing testimony of all the manuscripts counts for nothing." Bernhard Weiss² is confident that "no group of witnesses furnishes a faultless text. Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, and Hort differ too much among themselves." "There are more mistakes in the Epistles in B and Aleph of the fourth century than in manuscripts of the ninth century. Where eighteen old manuscripts agree, they are probably right. Where four hundred late manuscripts agree, they are probably right."³ Bishop Ellicott charged Tischendorf with "a childish infirmity of judgment in his exaggerated preference for Aleph." A similar charge might be brought against Dr. Hort. B was his Jonathan, and Aleph the armor-bearer. But, as Dean Burgon said, "B and Aleph are not antiquity: they are only two specimens of antiquity. There are many older specimens in the Versions and Church Fathers. A pyramid cannot be made to stand on its apex." Dr. Salmon suggested this dialogue with Dr. Hort: "What authority should be followed?—B and Aleph.—If Aleph is against B?—B, if any support can be found.—If B stands alone?—B, unless there is an evident mistake of the scribe.—If B is blank?—Then Aleph.—What about D?—Kill him." Dr. Broadus, in his "Commentary on Matthew," says: "Dr. Hort seems to err in following a small group of documents against internal evidence."

Another method which Dr. Hort adopted to overcome the overwhelming opposition to the B text was to rule out entirely all late codices. Not quite all, for among a thou-

¹ *Kritik des Neuen Testaments* (1904).

² *Text Criticism of the Gospels* (1896).

³ *Text Criticism of the Epistles* (1901).

sand rejected minuscules he found three or four that were abridged, like B; but this judgment of his has been reversed by a competent court. R. C. Jebb affirms that "the age of a manuscript does not necessarily prove anything. A late copy of a good old manuscript that is not extant is better than an earlier manuscript of a corrupt type." F. G. Kenyon says that "a late vellum is often more correct than the oldest papyri. The Vulgate text of Homer existed before Aristarchus, and persists unaffected by his critical labors." Grenfell and Hunt show from the papyri that "an inferior manuscript may have a superior reading." Jülicher thinks that "every one will soon agree that the cursives have been undervalued." "We resist the scheme which excludes the cursives from all real influence in determining the text," Dr. Scrivener protests. "A judge is not impartial if he rejects the testimony of eighty-nine out of a hundred witnesses. It is a law of evidence that the very few are to be suspected rather than the very many."

Another weapon that Dr. Hort used against the longer and commonly received text was an argument taken from Lachmann; namely, that the text must be determined by external evidence exclusively. Dr. Hort's words are, "Readings are decided on their own merits, irrespective of interpretation." To this Dr. Field replies, "B and Aleph deserve the greatest respect, but the interest of truth requires that they should continually be held in check by a reference to internal evidence of good sense and of the propriety of the passage itself. Where a document is inclined to absurdity in sense and impossibility in construction, this internal evidence should be allowed to turn the scale." "Internal tokens of authority," Dr. A. P. Peabody holds, "have more value than external proofs." Bernhard Weiss finds that "there is a certain feeling of what is or is not possible. The criticism of the text cannot be separated from exegesis." Frederick Blass says that

“the English revisers voted against innovations, and yet they made many; but they say these were made not arbitrarily, but by authority. By what authority? By the authority of B and Aleph. But is it not arbitrary to clothe with authority the copyists of two manuscripts, and to omit what they omit? A late manuscript with a reading used by Irenæus is preferable to an old manuscript without such patristic support. The copyist, not the author, is to be blamed wherever obscurity or perversity or nonsense occurs in a manuscript. When the reading of B is unintelligible, while in a later manuscript it is quite plain, Dr. Hort calls it a correction, and rejects it. Many different correctors have worked over Aleph. Shall we follow the original text, or, if not that, which one of the correctors?”

Burkitt and Turner¹ actually put above B and Aleph the authority of the Latin and Syriac versions, which were made not three hundred, but less than one hundred, years after the death of the apostles. It is little to the credit of textual criticism of the New Testament that Tischendorf, after having said, in his edition of 1859, that “the principles of inner criticism are established on undeniable facts,” should have made 3,369 changes in the text of his next edition. To be sure, this great number of changes was due to the discovery of Aleph; but he had made 700 changes in 1859, and 1,300 ten years before.

Tischendorf’s “Greek Testament,” edited by Gebhardt, and B. Weiss’s “Greek Testament” are used as counter weights to Hort’s text in the composite text prepared by Eberhard Nestle, and now published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Where Weiss and Gebhardt agree against Hort, their reading is adopted by Nestle. Weymouth’s Resultant Text likewise proves that Hort did not produce the final text, as he announced he would. All of his positions have been attacked if not taken, and the mistakes of Hort’s Greek text are transmitted in the Canterbury Revision, which is thus so far discredited.

¹ *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. II. p. 602.