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For the Christian Messenger.

Various Readings of the Greek Testament.

Mr. Editor,—

For the benefit of ordinary readers it seems to me requisite to offer a few explanatory remarks on this subject, to which attention has been recently called in the *Christian Messenger*.

During the period that elapsed between the writing of the books of the New Testament and the invention of the art of printing—about 1400 years—every copy was necessarily written out by hand. It can not be reasonably imagined that a continual miracle would so guide the pens of the numerous copyists that no discrepancies should ever occur. The diversities which are found to exist in manuscript copies, as also in printed editions, are called *various readings*. In some instances a transcriber may have been mistaken as to a word obscurely written, in others one might accidentally omit a word, a clause, or even a sentence; or he might add one or more words by way of explanation. But from whatever cause these various readings may have resulted, in every case one only can be genuine or correct, and the other, or others, must be spurious or incorrect.

It is obviously desirable to ascertain, with all possible exactness, which of these readings, wherever they are found, presents to us the word or words penned by the inspired writer, or at his dictation. When that which is called the *Received Text* of the Greek Testament was generally adopted, with some slight variations, by the erudite lovers of Scripture in different countries, and by people of various denominations, there were not the same facilities for determining questions of this nature as those now possessed. Neither the antiquity of that text, nor its extensive reception, can justly entitle it to be regarded as infallibly correct. Nevertheless, as it has been made substantially the basis of numerous translations, and recent investigations have tended to establish its general accuracy, it appears to me undesirable to introduce any material changes—necessarily attended with various inconveniences—without very decisive reasons to confirm them.

It is known to all who are in any considerable degree acquainted with the subject, that modern biblical critics, after elaborate researches, in many instances arrive at opposite conclusions with reference to the genuine reading. They differ in their judgments with regard to the antiquity and the authority of certain manuscripts, as also other grounds on which a decision should rest. In some cases their preconceived opinions, or sentiments, may exert an influence. It therefore appears inconsistent to follow any one of these guides implicitly. By doing so we would be liable to reject the genuine reading, and to adopt a spurious one, or to expunge from the sacred Volume some portions of divine Revelation, which have been perused by generations past with interest and profit. This important matter obviously requires much caution.

Under these considerations I approve of the plan proposed by Dean Alford, (C. M. Nov. 9th, p. 354.) "Let a commission of men learned in the Scriptures be appointed, chosen from our different Christian denominations, with definite powers as to this weighty matter, to be exercised under proper safeguards." One of these "safeguards" evidently should be, that no change be made by mere majority; but that the propriety and necessity of it must be so manifest that, if not all, at least three-fourths of the men appointed will be agreed in the adoption of it. In the event of such an arrangement being carried into effect, it may be reasonably expected that the changes made will be real improvements; and that considerate people of different denominations will acquiesce, and receive them.

It will doubtless occur to the minds of many that this is in substance the same plan as that proposed by me, (C. M., April 18th and 25th, 1851, pp. 124 and 132,) with reference to a Revision of the Common English Translation of the Bible. Indeed, the Dean appears to include the latter object, "at least

as far as regards the New Testament," in connection with the revision of the Greek text.

I commend his candor in proposing to have a number of learned men, of different denominations, combined in these undertakings; for it is apparent to me, that he is not himself such a prudent and cautious critic as may be safely trusted to perform either of these works alone. His unguarded statements—in my opinion unfounded—that "our English Version abounds with errors," and that "we are printing for reading in our churches, we are sending forth into the cottage and the mansion, books containing passages and phrases which pretend to be the word of God, and are not," are adapted to unsettle the faith of unlearned persons, and to cause them, if they be not wholly deterred from reading the only Bible to which they have access, to read it with continual distrust. His representation with regard to the various readings, that "some of the differences are very important," is calculated to produce the alarming impression, that they seriously affect matters of faith or practice. But this is opposed to the concurrent testimony of judicious critics. So Dr. Cramp, while he commends the work of Dean Alford, says, (C. M. Nov. 23rd, pp. 369 and 370.) "that great as is the number of various readings, no fact or truth of the Scriptures is affected by them." The learned Thomas Hartwell Horne (Introduction, &c., Vol. i. p. 118,) speaking of manuscripts of the whole New Testament, says, "The very worst manuscript extant would not pervert one article of our faith, or destroy one moral precept." Even Granville Penn, Esq., much as he was disposed to follow one manuscript, and to charge copyists with interpolation, notices the remarkable agreement, in all material points, among "learned collators" of the contending bodies of Roman Catholics, as "Bengel," the Greek Church, as "Mathaci," and Protestants, as "Mill, Wetstein, Griesbach, Birch, and others." (Annotations, &c., Preface, p. 24.)

We have evidently, then, abundant cause of thankfulness, that Providence, without miraculously preserving the numerous transcribers from all inadvertencies, has graciously caused the inspired text to be transmitted to us in such a state of purity, that we need be in no doubt what to believe, or what to practise.

The attentive reader may perceive, that the specimens adduced from the Dean's Work, (C. M. p. 370.) do by no means justify his strong language. If all the words rejected by him as *interpolations*, be such, they teach nothing that is not either implied in the words admitted to be genuine, or distinctly taught in other parts of acknowledged Scripture. It may, however, be seriously questioned, whether he has not proposed, at least in some instances, to expunge words actually written by the pen of inspiration. For instance, there appears to me no sufficient reason to doubt, that Paul wrote "Theos, God, in 1 Tim. iii. 16.—"God was manifest in the flesh." This is the only reading that makes a consistent sense; and it is in exact accordance with other inspired declarations. (See Jac. i. 1, 14, Rom. i. 3, 4; viii. 3; ix. 5. Phil. ii. 6, 7. Heb. i. 8-12; ii. 14.) It was unquestionably in the early copies used by the Greek Fathers Chrysostom, Cyril, and Theodorct. (See Bp. Pearson on the Creed, Dobson's Ed. p. 192-195, and the Notes of Drs. A. Clarke and J. Macknight.)

Every intelligent reader is aware, that in copying it is far more common to omit words, through oversight, than to add. If one copyist at an early period accidentally omitted a word, phrase, or sentence, his copy might become an exemplar whence many more were transcribed. In all these there would, of course, be the same omission or omissions. From these they would naturally be perpetuated from generation to generation. Moreover, one *positive* witness outweighs many *negative* ones. A manuscript of later date may be more accurate than one written earlier; because it may have been copied, either immediately or mediately, from one still older and more correct. Especially where there is no cause assignable why a transcriber should have purposely falsified his copy by addition, it does not seem consistent to reject the received reading merely because a majority of

manuscripts, or some of ancient date, or early translations, do not contain it.

If in any instance our Translators followed a copy in which the transcriber had inserted twice what an Apostle wrote only once, as is alleged with reference to Rom. viii. 1, it is nevertheless 'the word of God,' since precisely the same expression—"who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"—is acknowledged to be genuine in verso 4th. It in 2 Tim. iv. 1, and Tit. i. 4, a copyist did prefix 'The Lord' to "Jesus Christ"—it is so in the ancient Syriac Version—it surely can not be denied that the phrase, "The Lord Jesus Christ," is pure Scripture. (Act. xvi. 31, 2 Cor. xvi. 22.) Whether a word certainly implied and to be understood, as *mou, my*, in Philem. 18th or *de, but* in 3 John 11th, was actually written by the inspired penman, or supplied by a copyist, is evidently a matter of no practical consequence.

It can not be consistently questioned that, in cases not at all affecting any truth or duty of Christianity, some slight emendations may be made in the received Greek text; nor that every translation—all translators being fallible—is susceptible of improvement. Great care, however, ought to be exercised by all who either write or speak on the subject, neither to afford any pretext to skeptical men to allege, as has been done of late, that 'the Ministers themselves acknowledge that some parts of the Bible are not true,' nor to cast any stumbling-block in the way of ordinary readers. For the satisfaction of these I deem it my duty to state, in conclusion, that I have perused the New Testament in ten different languages; and that neither the diversities in the Greek text followed, nor the differences in the translations, are of such a nature as to render it at all difficult for any sincere inquirer—understanding the language—to learn from any one of them, in connection with the Old Testament, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the way of salvation and the path of duty.

Yours in gospel bonds,

CHARLES TUPPER.

Tremont, Aylestard, Dec. 7th, 1864.

A Dream that was not all a Dream.

A merchant at the close of a day during which in addition to uncommon business perplexity, his patience had been sorely taxed by repeated and importunate applications for donations to various charities, found himself in his favorite retreat—his library. Wrapped in a sumptuous gown, his feet clad in easy and richly-wrought slippers, he had flung his wearied frame into his study chair, and, exhausted by the cares of the day, he fell asleep. In his sleep he dreamed. In his dream he saw a stranger standing before him, who, drawing a paper from his bosom, thus addressed him:

"My friend, I come to beg of you, in view of the special necessities of our Master's cause at this time, an increase, for this year, of one-third upon your ordinary subscription to the cause of Foreign Missions."

"Sir," he replied, "this year will be to me one of uncommon expense. My new house is just finished and furnished, and such are the demands upon my purse, that I shall hardly be able to give as much for that cause as I did last year."

The stranger then drew forth a second paper from his bosom, and made the same request with reference to the Domestic Mission work.

The merchant, annoyed at this, repeated his reply with additional emphasis and in briefer terms.

No way disconcerted by the rebuff, the stranger laying the two papers upon the table, and drawing another from his bosom, made a like request in behalf of the Bible cause.

To this the half-angry merchant gave a short and not overkind response.

This paper the stranger laid upon the table, and drew still another from his bosom, and asked the same favor for the Colporteur work.

This request being answered with a frown, the stranger laid it upon the table, drew forth yet another, and asked for a like increase to his ordinary subscription for that. And so he continued his appeals, until quite a pile of

subscription papers lay upon the merchant's table, while the irritated, and, in his own view, insulted man, looked on in sullen silence.

At last the stranger, more in sorrow than in anger, yet in a tone that thrilled the listener to his very heart, said:

"Look at me, and listen! Five years ago you were on the very verge of bankruptcy. Your fortune seemed just spreading its wings to leave you penniless, and your family without means to buy even bread to eat. And in that dark hour, O how you prayed—prayed for relief from the threatened ruin! Who was it that pitied your distress, heard your prayer, and rolled the dismal cloud away?"

"Seven years ago, you lay upon what you deemed, and your weeping friends considered, a bed of death. The physician had given up all hope. And when you thought of that woman soon to become a widow, of those children soon to become orphans, and of their probable struggles with privation and want, you turned your face to the wall and wept. O! how bitter were those tears! And you cried out for reprieve—reprieve until you might make some provision for their wants. Who was it heard that piteous cry, and gave you what you asked?"

"Ten years ago, your oldest boy sank into the grave. As the hour drew on, you saw that he was dying in despair. And as you thought of the awful future that awaited him, you remember the anguish of your spirit. Entering your closet, you locked the door, and spent one long night in agonizing prayer. You prayed not for the life, but for the soul, of your darling. O God! you cried, 'save, save, for Jesus' sake, save the soul of my dying child!' Who was it heard that prayer, and sent your son to heaven in the triumphs of faith and the joys of a brilliant hope of everlasting bliss?"

"Fifteen years ago, you were in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. A sense of your guilt seized you, and for days and weeks there seemed to be no ray of hope for your poor soul. The darkness became more intense. Comfort forsook your spirit by day, and sleep your eyes by night. But just when a settled despair seemed to seal up your spirit to an awful doom, the light broke, and you sprang from despair to the arms of a forgiving Redeemer, and a joy like that of heaven filled your cup to overflowing. Who was it pitied you in that dark hour, and took your sins away?"

As the merchant listened to the thrilling tale, trembling seized his limbs, a sweat broke out upon his brow; and looking up, he saw two hands held out to him. They had been pierced with nails, and were dropping blood. Glancing at the face of the speaker, he saw streams of blood like great tears streaming down that face of love, from the wounds made by the crown of thorns. The side, too had been pierced with a spear, and the feet were torn and bleeding.

And as he gazed, he awoke. It was a dream; but deep in his soul he knew that it was not all a dream. And kneeling upon the floor, he lifted his hands to heaven and cried for pardon, and then and there he pledged his soul, his body, and his fortune to Him whose life-blood had been poured out for his salvation.

Three steps to heaven.

Rev. Rowland Hill once visited a poor silly man, and on conversing with him, said, "Well, Richard, do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?"

"I'm sure I do; don't you?"

"Heaven is a long way off," said the minister, "and the journey is difficult."

"Do you think so? I think heaven is very near."

"Most people think it is a very difficult matter to get to heaven."

"I think heaven is very near," said Richard again, "and the way to it is very short, there are only three steps there."

Mr. Hill replied, "Only three steps?"

"Richard repeated, "Only three steps?"

"And pray," said the pastor, "what do you consider those three steps to be?"

"Those three steps are, out of self, unto Christ, into glory."

The blessings we enjoy are not the fruit of our own merit, but the fruit of God's mercy.