

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

THE

**New Testament
Manuscripts,**

OR,

CHRISTIANITY COMPLETELY UNDERMINED.

By JOSEPH SYMES.

WITH FAC-SIMILES OF MSS.

SECOND EDITION.

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EXPLANATION OF THE FAC-SIMILES.

THE first is a specimen of the running hand, written on Egyptian papyrus some time between B.C. 100 and 100 A.D. It is a fragment of Hyperides, an orator of the time of Demosthenes, 4th century B.C.

The second is an extract from Philodemos, a philosopher and poet of Cicero's day.

The third specimen is from a manuscript of the Greek Old Testament (Codex Frederico-Augustanus). It contains 2 Sam. vii. 10-11.

The fourth is a specimen of Codex Sinaiticus, the famous manuscript which Tischendorf brought (the monks say, stole) from the convent of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, 1859. The part quoted is Luke xxiv. 33-34

The two lines on the right-hand side below, written up and down, deserve a moment's notice. They also are from Codex Sinaiticus, and are a portion of 1 Timothy iii. 16, a passage which has given the Christians endless trouble and led to disputes which reason can never settle. The text reads *to tes eusebeias mysterion*; but whether the next word is *hos* or *ho*. The difficulty arises from the fact that the manuscript writers and copiers frequently contracted or abbreviated words, as we do still. We write Mr. for mister or master; Mrs. for mistress; Dr. for doctor, etc. And in the ancient manuscripts OC stand for *hos* (who); and the same letters, with horizontal lines across the O stand for *theos* (God). The puzzle then is to decide whether 1 Tim. iii. 16 should be read who (or which) or God!—a very serious puzzle indeed, and one it is now too late to clear up, without a new revelation—which even the most pious do not expect.

As Dr. Scrivener says, "This text has proved the *crux criticorum*," the despair of the critics, we may say. And it is plain the text in Codex Sinaiticus has been tampered with or else corrected by the author. Let the reader look at it—the second perpendicular line, right-hand side below. Reading up the line, the last letters are OCE. (The C is pronounced S, by the way.) Partly over the O and partly over the preceding letter N, you see a peculiar compound mark, which Tischendorf says was made by some corrector in the 12th century. The mark is evidently *the*, which together with OC below, make *theos* or God.

The text commonly reads, *great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh*. But this celebrated manuscript of Tischendorf's reads in the first hand, *Great is the mystery of godliness WHO was manifested in the flesh*.

There are hundreds of similar doubtful readings in the manuscripts; and I have given this as a specimen that all can understand.

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ΚΑΝΑΝΤΗ & ΟΛΩΙΚΕ
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ΘΡΟΙΣ ΜΕΝΟΥΣΤΗ
ΕΝ ΔΕΚΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ
ΣΥΝ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΔΕΡ

ΤΟ ΤΗΣ ΕΥΣΕΒΙΑΣ
ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΟΣΕ

FRAGMENT OF GREEK NEW TESTAMENT MSS.

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 ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΑΝΑΒΑΣΙΝ ΑΣΑΙΟΥ
 ΡΟΥΣΙΝ ΟΤΙ ΑΝΑΚΕΚΥ
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 ΘΕΥΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΜΝΗΜΕ
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 ΘΑΔΑΒΓΕΙ ΔΥΤΑΙΣ ΜΗ
 ΕΡΘΑΜΕ ΕΙΣ ΘΕΤΗΝ ΖΗΤΗ
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 ΔΥΤΟΝ ΑΛΛΑ ΥΠΑΓΕΤΕ
 ΕΙΠΑΤΕ ΤΟΙΣ ΜΑΘΗΤΑΙΣ
 ΔΥΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΤΩ ΠΕΤΡΩ
 ΟΤΙ ΠΡΟΑΓΕΙ ΥΜΑΣ ΕΙΣ
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 ΤΟΝ ΟΥ ΕΣΘΕ ΚΑΘΩΣ ΕΙ
 ΠΕΝ ΥΜΙΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΕΛΘΕΤΕ
 ΣΑΙ ΕΦΥΓΟΝ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΥ
 ΜΝΗΜΕΙΟΥ ΕΙΧΕΝ ΓΑΡ
 ΑΥΤΑΣ ΤΡΟΜΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΚ
 ΣΤΑΣΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΟΥΔΕΝΙΟΥ
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ΚΑΤΕ
 ΟΥΔΕΝΙΟΥ

THE printed Greek
 (in English letters)
 runs thus :—min ton
 lithon ek tes thuras
 tou mnemeiou kai
 anablepsasai theo-
 rousin hoti anake-
 kulistai ho lithos en
 gar megas sphodra
 kai elthousai eis to
 mnemeion eidon ne-
 aniskon kathemenon
 en tois dexiois peri-
 beblemenon stolen
 leuken kai exetham-
 bethesan ho de legei
 autais me ektham-
 beisthe iesoun ze-
 teite ton nazarenon
 ton estauromenon
 ergerthe ouk estin
 hode ide ho topos
 hopou ethekan au-
 ton alla hupagete
 eipate tois mathetais
 autou kai to petro
 hoti proagei humas
 eis ten galilaian ekei
 auton opsesthe kathos
 eipen humin kai exel-
 thousai ephugon apo
 tou mnemeiou eichen
 gar autas tromos kai
 ekstasis kai ouden
 ouden eipon ephoboun
 gar.

Kata Markon.

P R E F A C E .

I MUST ask the reader to observe that the following notes upon the New Testament Manuscripts are not intended to be a treatise or at all exhaustive. The pamphlet is a reprint from several consecutive numbers of the *Liberator*; and the notes were written as the printers required copy. Hence there will be seen a want of consecutiveness in them, which I hope may be forgiven.

I have written for the multitude, not for scholars; although, I respectfully submit, the best of Christian scholars would do well to consider the points and issues I raise. Let them remember that every item in the liberal thought of to-day was first supplied by Freethinkers, and long afterwards adopted by the Christians when they found their old notions no longer tenable. So must it be in the future. The views I here advance will be generally adopted in the next generation.

I may here note a common argument of the Christians, though not so confidently urged now as in former days:—

It is often said that we have better evidence for the Christian scriptures than for the Classical works of Greece and Rome—that is, that it is easier to prove, for example, that Matthew wrote the gospel which goes in his name than to prove that any given Greek or Roman author wrote a work circulating in his name. If that be so, we are quite in the dark as to the origin of the Classical books, for the most eager defender of the faith has never yet been able to show when, or where, or by whom, any of the New Testament books were written.

Further, I submit that, had there been various sects of Classicists, all trying to exterminate the rest; and had one powerful sect gained the upper-hand and destroyed its rivals and their books as well, and libelled them into the bargain; and further, that if most of what we hold to be Classical literature emerged from the care and keeping of that conquering sect, we could have no confidence whatsoever in the teachings of that sect as regards the authors, etc., of the books they handed over to us. Add to this the supposition that the books actually preserved, on the whole, strongly favored the pretensions of the sect which preserved them, and you see how suspicious would be their testimony.

Well, it is not the poor people, nor the masses of the people, to whom we owe the preservation of the New Testament, but to the most villainous set of men ever known, and men whose prime tenets are supported by these very books.

When we further reflect upon the forgeries and lies the dominant sects have always resorted to on occasion, we shall see that anything

coming from them must be regarded with the strongest suspicion until independent evidence can be obtained.

All things considered, the case of the Classical books, though by no means satisfactory, is not a tenth as bad as the case of the New Testament, which is vouched for mainly by those who benefit by it.

Since I began my notes on the manuscripts, quite unexpectedly, a friend has offered to produce a *fac-simile* or two expressly for me; and through that gentleman's kindness I am now able to publish, in addition to the previous fragments, a *fac-simile*, slightly reduced, of a small portion of the Vatican manuscript or Codex Vaticanus, as scholars are pleased to call it.

In the column beside it I have given the same words in the ordinary New Testament Greek, but in English letters. It is not necessary to insert the translation, as any one with an English New Testament may read it for himself in Mark xvi. 3-8.

Please look over this *fac-simile* and note a fact or two. 1. It is all in capital letters, or uncials, as scholars call them. 2. There are no divisions between the words, and therefore the manuscript is difficult to read, and in many cases quite uncertain. 3. In the 14th line from the top there is a contraction, *in*, which is read "iesoun" or Jesus (acc. case). But the word must be doubtful, in the nature of the case. 4. There are little marks over many of the letters which scholars say were inserted by some one long after the manuscript was first written. That may be, but who can be sure? 5. Below are two words, "Kata Markon," said to be by a later scribe. Who knows?

Note.—It is by such trifles scholars undertake to decide the dates of manuscripts. The whole thing is doubtful in the extreme.

It may not be out of place to rehearse a few facts relating to the Greek Testament, facts that should be persistently put before our Christian neighbors and opponents. The clergy should be challenged to say whether these statements are facts or fictions. And if I am wrong in my statements, they should be urged to refute them.

It is no advantage to me to deny the truth or to preach and teach error. If the New Testament is really an authentic history, it will pay me well to say so. There are many thousands of people ardently anxious that I should cease my opposition to their beliefs and begin again to preach the Gospel I have labored so long to discredit. Therefore, it will be an immense advantage to me to be shown and convinced that the New Testament is true history; for, once satisfied of that, I shall preach it most earnestly. And to do so would bring me £20, where I now get one. Therefore, if I oppose and expose the New Testament and Christianity, it must be conceded that some moral and legitimate motive impels me to do so.

On the other hand, if the clergy are not able to refute me, they have no right to continue to preach and to live upon what they are not able to prove to be true. If they can confute me, and will not, they must be extremely immoral to permit me to propagate serious error and misrepresentations of the truth, which they can so easily put a stop to.

To bring matters to an issue, I assert without fear of contradiction, that the whole round of the gospel is an unfounded superstition; that the Gospels are frauds and forgeries; the New Testament a book of most uncertain date; and that, instead of having been written by eye-witnesses of the things it relates, no proof exists that the book is yet so much as 1,000 years old—Though I do not deny that it may be older.

I assert that the New Testament manuscripts now existing cannot be traced back to any known author or writer or copier; and that it is impossible to discover in what country any one of them was produced. Nor is it possible to fix, within hundreds of years, the date when any one of them was written.

Such is my challenge. And there is more to follow. Our common New Testaments assert, on their title-page, that the English version has been "translated out of the original Greek."

Now this was a known falsehood when first circulated. The bishops and others of the English Church, in the reign of James I., were fully aware that the Greek they used did not pretend to be the original; they were well aware that no one had ever pretended to have seen the original—unless they meant to say that the printed text they had was the original, as they certainly did not. Those scholars knew that Erasmus, the Catholic critics, Stephens, and the rest, who had for many years been examining manuscripts, had none of them ever hinted or whispered that they had found the original.

Therefore, when those bishops authorised the printer to print "translated out of the original Greek," they perpetrated a most deliberate fib, and a fib that has imposed upon countless millions of confiding people.

There was no excuse for this falsehood of theirs, except such an excuse as vanity, ambition, or deliberate imposture could supply.

And whatever excuse might be urged for bishops and others of nearly 300 years ago, there can be no shadow of excuse for those who continue to reprint and circulate this fib. Since those ancient bishops died, and most especially during the last sixty years, every known corner has been ransacked for New Testament manuscripts; the most strenuous efforts have been made by Christian critics, armed with all the weapons learning could give, to connect the New Testament with the alleged apostles, and with Jesus. All such efforts have hopelessly failed. No record, no scrap, of the originals can be found; no materials can be discovered out of which to construct a historical bridge to connect the oldest known manuscript with the apostles or with Jesus.

Even if I admitted that Jesus and his apostles may have been real persons and not fictions, still from the time of their death down to the oldest fragment of real Church history, and down to the oldest New Testament manuscript yet found, there must be reckoned hundreds of years. Although the popular defender of the faith tries to brazen it out and talks confidently, scholars know, and some of them admit all that I contend for—in effect, if not in the language I employ. I must quote a few passages from well known Christian works.

Smith's Bible Dictionary, 1863, article "New Testament" (by Westcott the late Bishop of Durham), says, "It does not appear that any special care was taken in the first age to preserve the books of the New Testament from the various injuries of time, or to insure perfect accuracy of transcription. They were given as a heritage to man, and it was some time before men felt the full value of the gift. The original copies seem to have soon perished; and we may perhaps see in this a providential provision against the spirit of superstition which in earlier times converted the symbols of God's redemption into objects of idolatry (2 Kings xviii. 4). It is certainly remarkable that in the controversies at the close of the second century, which often turned upon disputed readings of scripture, no appeal was made to the apostolic originals. The few passages in which it has been supposed that they are referred to will not bear examination."

The writer then proceeds to dispose of certain imaginary references to the originals in Ignatius and Tertullian.

He proceeds, "No Manuscript of the New Testament of the first three centuries remains." He drops the innocent remark that, "As soon as definite controversies arose among Christians, the text of the New Testament assumed its true importance." Westcott notes the fact that the early Christians mutually accused each other of corrupting their sacred books. The last note I need quote from him just at present is this, "*History affords no trace of the pure apostolic originals.*"

Here, then, I have quoted from this Christian divine all that is needed to justify the strong language I have used above. Of course, the reader will perceive that Westcott, having a shockingly bad case, makes the best he is able of it. He raises a pious dust, talks of providence, idolatry, etc. Still the truth appears quite plainly through the mist; and the truth may thus be summed up:—

1. Had the New Testament been an inspired book or a correct record of the life of Christ and his apostles, there never could have been a time when Christians could have valued them at less than their real worth. Those who wrote the books would surely not be blind to their value! They could not have been careless as to whom they confided the books.

2. Those who received them from the authors must have valued them as the most precious heritage of the Church, as Westcott fully admits in hinting that people might have worshipped the originals if God had not providentially destroyed what he had taken such pains to inspire!—a wonderfully comical way of accounting for the loss or early destruction of the originals, surely!

3. But Westcott was too wide awake not to understand why no books have descended to us from the apostles, etc.—they never wrote any, that is the truth. If they had done so, there would have been no lack of evidence for it. It is not in the power of the most cunning defender of the faith to assign or to suggest a plausible reason why the apostolic originals are not now in existence, supposing the apostles really wrote and published anything.

4. The fact that controversies arose so early and that they were neither prevented nor settled by appeals to the apostolic originals is clear proof that such originals never existed. How could controversies arise amongst people who had the New Testament, as they supposed, as an infallible guide? And, granting the controversies, it is inconceivable that the disputants should have failed to appeal to an apostolic standard, if such had really existed.

All these admissions of Westcott are plain proof that the New Testament did not exist at the close of the 2nd century, when those controversies raged. That being so, the New Testament must be set down as a forgery of later times; but how much later cannot as yet be ascertained. As Westcott says, the text assumed its true importance in times of controversy! Just so. All the round of dogmatic theology arose and was produced in times of controversy. And it is plain that the New Testament was forged by the squabbling Christians for the purpose of defending themselves and demolishing their opponents. Yes, and the book itself is plentifully sprinkled over with the evidences of that.

THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS.

It seems to me that Christian writers upon this subject make admissions or statements, which, properly considered, are quite fatal to all historical claims of or for the New Testament. I have quoted a specimen or two from Bishop Westcott, and here are others.

Dr. Newth, one of the authors of the *Revised Version*, says, in *Lectures on Revision*, 1881, "It is scarcely needed to state that we do not now possess the original copies of any of the books of the Old or the New Testament. Even while these (that is, the originals) were still in existence it was necessary to transcribe them in order that many persons in many places might possess and read them."

I note here, 1st.—That the statement that we do not possess the originals of any portions of the Bible is strictly and absolutely true. But, 2nd.—The assumption that the originals were copied and copied in order to give many persons the opportunity to read them is a mere assumption with not one known fact to support it. If Dr. Newth could prove the originals to have been copied, as he says they were, he would more than half prove the New Testament historical; but the originals, as I shall show later, are nowhere mentioned by any ancient writer. If many persons wanted copies to read, popular education must have been early prevalent; but by common consent, the early Christians were not only of the poorer classes, for the greater part, but also quite illiterate.

The doctor proceeds to show how almost impossible it was to produce correct copies of the Bible. "In the work of transcription, *however careful the transcriber might have been*, errors of various kinds necessarily arose; some from mistaking one letter for another; some from failure of memory, if the scribe were writing from dictation; and some from occasional oversight, if he were writing from a copy before him; some from momentary lapses of attention, when his hand wrote on without his guidance; and some from an attempt to correct a real or fancied error of his predecessor" (p. 3).

I ask, What could the Holy Ghost be thinking about to give mankind a revelation in so uncertain and unreliable a manner! This point must be pushed. Nothing could be more blundersome or more provocative of blunders than the course taken; and the Holy Ghost, if he inspired the Bible, must be held responsible for all the errors of all its copies. He committed the first and fatal blunder of trying to do what was impossible to be done by the means he employed.

Dr. Newth says (p. 4) that the more recent the manuscripts are, the greater is the agreement amongst them! That is as good as to say, The more ancient your manuscripts are, the more do they

disagree amongst themselves! Well, critics tell you their oldest existing New Testament manuscripts date from the 4th century. If, then, the oldest disagree more and more in proportion to their age, if we had the 3rd century manuscripts, we should find they differed still more than the oldest we have; if the 2nd century ones could be recovered, we should find them worse still! and the 1st century ones, the worst of all!!

In other words, the nearer you approach the fountain head of Christianity, the more impure you find the waters! That being so, of what conceivable value are the most ancient manuscripts? Nay, of what value are any of them? These are questions no scholar can answer in any satisfactory manner. Confusion of confusion, all is confusion and vexation of spirit; and the more the subject is stirred, the more bewildered does the honest investigator become. If it were the Koran that was concerned, instead of the New Testament, how sarcastically and scornfully the Christian scholars would wax over such admissions and statements as I have quoted above. How readily, in that case, would they perceive that the evidences were totally unreliable and hardly worth refuting! But reverence for their own fetish book has completely blinded most of the Christian doctors, on the one hand, of the Mohammedan doctors, on the other; and none but Freethinkers can ever settle the difficulties of either party.

Even the printing press, as Dr. Newth says, has by no means abolished errors from the Bible. He supplies the following examples of even printed errors in God's most holy word, which the Holy Ghost never took the trouble to correct, although the bishops and clergy were as full of that ghost when those errors were committed as at any time in the history of the Church.

In a Bible, called the "wicked Bible," printed in 1631, Exodus xx. 14 reads, "Thou shalt commit adultery." In another, printed 1682, Deut. xxiv. 3 reads, "If the latter husband ate her," instead of "hate her." "He slew two lions like men," was printed for "two lion-like men" (2 Sam. xxiii. 20), in a Bible dated 1638. "Deliver up their children to the swine" (Jer. xviii. 21) for "to the famine," appears in a Bible of 1682.

There are several others not worth quoting here. If such blunders may occur in a printed book, what blunders may *not* have been committed in the ancient manuscripts! Look at the *fac-similes* we give, and note how easy it must have been, in copying hundreds of pages of such manuscript, to fall into errors.

Dr. Newth says again, "The exact words used by the inspired writers are not now to be found in any one book or manuscript. They have to be gathered from various sources, by long and careful labor, demanding much skill and learning. These sources, moreover, are so numerous that the investigation of them can be accomplished only by a large division of labor, no one life being long enough for the task, and no one scholar having knowledge enough to complete it alone" (p. 79).

There is a confession of the utter hopelessness of the task. Let us note a point or two. 1. The common Bible will tell you, on its

title-page, that it was "translated out of the original" (Hebrew for the Old Testament, Greek for the New). But, as Newth and other writers openly acknowledge, this is most untrue, for the manuscripts used by the authors of our common Bible were recent ones and of no authority whatsoever. The statement, then, that the books were translated out of the original is as deliberate a lie as could be told.

2. Still, if no older or better manuscripts had been found, a few days would have sufficed to compare the printed copies with the manuscripts. Yes, and Christians would have gone on repeating the lie about the translation from the original, and would have declared that the exact and identical word of God was found in our common Bible.

3. But the whole question has been so closely studied since 1611, when our common Bible was first published, that some of the foremost scholars have set aside the text used then as of no value or authority whatsoever; and have tried to reconstruct the original New Testament out of older and, as they say, more reliable manuscripts.

4. But now another difficulty stares us in the face. Admitting that the manuscripts used by the authors of the *Revised Version* of 1881 to be better than those used in 1611, other manuscripts may soon be found better than any now known; and then the work of reconstructing God's holy but most delapidated word must all be done over again.

5. If no one manuscript contains the exact words of the original, as Newth declares, do any twenty manuscripts? or any hundred? or one thousand? Do all the known manuscripts contain "the exact words," etc.? How do you know? Who does know? Who pretends to know? If a thousand more manuscripts should be discovered, or forged and palmed off upon scholars, must the exact words be picked from them also?

6. If one life is too short for such a work, THEN NO MAN CAN EVER HAVE SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE TO ENTITLE HIM TO PASS AN OPINION UPON THE SUBJECT; therefore no man can ever have a just right to decide such a question or to help to decide it; and therefore, no man being capable of forming an independent opinion upon it, no two men can ever rationally agree upon the subject; and therefore, lastly, no number of men can ever have the just right to palm off their version upon the world, or the nation, or to express any opinion whatsoever upon the subject, except to say, "The task is too great for the human intellect, and can never be satisfactorily performed."

Such is the corner into which Dr. Newth unconsciously drives the Christian critics, himself with them; and by so doing, he unwittingly condemns the course taken by himself and his fellow workers who produced the *Revised Version*; for they undertook a work no number of men could possibly perform, and they settled all disputes and doubts by a majority vote!—voted what *was*, what was *not* God's word! Had the Revisers been only half as many, or double the number, how different the result of their voting must have been!

And it must not be forgotten that no other company can ever succeed any better, for the work is such that it never can be final.

In 1611 it was possible for the King and Parliament to produce a Bible pretending to be the right one; and most English speaking people accepted and used it as a genuine work. Scholars for ages have known better, and many would like to supersede it. But they cannot. An Act of Parliament now would never bind the people on such a subject; and no one church could issue a Bible that all would accept. No one man can do it. All the churches could never be brought to agreement on it. And there it rests—nay, not rests. There is no more rest for the churches, none for God's most holy word. Scepticism has won! The Bible is logically as dead as Psalmanazer's *History of Formosa*; and during the next generation or two the masses will be as well satisfied of that as scholars are at the present day.

The whole question of the value of the Bible has been unwittingly raised, in the last few years, by the English and American clergy; and this has been done by projecting and executing the Revision of the common English Bible. The first definite step was taken in this work, February 10, 1870, when the upper house of Convocation or "gathering" of the English Church parsons passed a resolution appointing a committee to perform the work of revising, amending and repairing the word of God.

There cannot be the least doubt that those men who then assembled expected to do a good stroke of business for their party and more or less embarrass, and perhaps defeat, the enemies of the faith. Whether they have succeeded in their object will be seen as we proceed. In fact, I may say just here that, in my esteem, no step was ever taken by a large section of the Church more fatal in its effects upon the popular superstition than this revision business.

Had the common English Bible, which was launched upon the world in 1611, been merely a faulty book more or less misrepresenting the written or manuscript Bible that preceded it, the revision and correction would have been easily accomplished, and no harm could have resulted.

Let the reader try to grip the situation. If I wrote a lengthy article for the *Freethinker*, and the printers made serious blunders in the printed copy, it would be very easy to correct them by means of my manuscript. Yes, but suppose that, instead of one manuscript, there were from one to two thousand manuscripts of the same article, all written in different hands, with different spelling; many of the manuscripts being unreadable in hundreds of places. And suppose most of those manuscripts were mere fragments, and only one or two (or not one) contained the entire article I wrote. And suppose one or two contained the article and much more besides that I never wrote.

Suppose, further, that the original manuscript which I wrote could nowhere be found; and that all the thousand or two thousand manuscripts of the article now known were copies of copies of copies and so on to an utterly unknown extent; and that all those copies were by unknown persons, in places and times unknown. Add to

this confusion the additional fact that the manuscripts contradicted or varied from each other in about 150,000 places, and that no man or number of men could tell which of them was nearest to or most remote from the original.

In addition to all this, suppose that no one knew what copy or copies the printers printed my article from, that they never told any one, or refused to tell, or were out of the way and could not be questioned.

Once more, suppose there were a dozen first-rate scholars engaged in sifting the copies, and that no two of them agreed as to which was best to follow or the nearest to the original.

And then suppose that no one had ever seen the original, but merely those copies of copies, etc., and that I would not or could not speak a word or take a step to clear up the mystery which no other person knew. And, lastly, suppose it doubtful if I ever did write the article, or that I, its reputed author, could not be proved ever to have lived.

With all these difficulties before you, how could you, or any other person, ever tell how the original article read and how it should be reproduced?

The case supposed is almost exactly parallel to the case of the Bible, or to keep to our present subject, the New Testament. And the attempt to Revise the book has had the effect of calling public attention to these fatal facts as it never before was called; and further, it has demonstrated to scholars themselves the utter hopelessness of all attempts to recover the original New Testament, or of deciding what it was like, whence it came, or what was its value.

Note once more the leading facts. The common English Bible was revised, patched, or repaired in 1611, the cobblers never having made it known what materials (manuscripts) they used in the patching, vamping, caulking, puttying, painting, gilding, or whatever name you may please to give to their work. This was very dishonest; but they did worse, they declared on the title-page that they translated from the original and compared with former translations. The first statement is a deliberate falsehood, for they knew the manuscripts they had were *not* the original—unless, by the way, the Bible, instead of being an ancient book, turns out to have been first written a few centuries ago. If that is so, the translators of the common Bible may have used the originals. But no Christian will adopt that view.

During 250 years many scholars worked with a will to improve the common Bible, and in the course of time materials were gathered up from many quarters; and for generations there was a growing conviction amongst the learned that something required to be done to bring the Bible into closer agreement with the "original," as they are pleased to call the manuscripts.

But just here the difficulties begin in earnest, and every step lands the workers deeper into the bog of uncertainty.

The Greek text of the New Testament first published by Erasmus and patched and mended by the Stephens of Paris, and called generally the *Textus Receptus*, *Received Text*, etc., was quietly set aside

as of no authority at all by the men who made the Revised Version of 1881. They say, in the preface to the New Testament, that all the Greek Testaments used by the translators of 1611 "were founded for the most part on manuscripts of late date, few in number, and used with little critical skill," This text of the old translators, they say, "needed thorough revision." They add, "A revision of the Greek text was the necessary foundation of our work; but it did not fall within our province to construct a continuous and complete Greek text."

Why not? They imply that that was really necessary; and therefore it ought to have been done, and done before going any further; for what was wanted was not a translation of some imperfect and uncertain text, but of the undoubted word of God.

"Textual Criticism," say they in their preface, "as applied to the Greek New Testament, forms a special study of much intricacy and difficulty, and EVEN NOW LEAVES ROOM FOR CONSIDERABLE VARIETY OF OPINION AMONG COMPETENT CRITICS. Different schools of criticism have been represented among us, and have together contributed to the final result."

Just so. They mean to say, but don't like to speak plainly, that the Revisers were often at sixes and sevens, and found it impossible to settle their disputes but by a majority vote! Fancy settling what Homer wrote in the same way! Fancy settling history by a vote! Fancy deciding points in Mathematics in that way! And then fancy voting upon the question, Which manuscripts shall we follow in this or that verse or chapter?

Yes, the Revisers voted, for that was the only way of settling their difficulties—the only way. And their vote tells us how God wrote and what he wrote. This is a clever dodge, mind. And it is precisely the same dodge resorted to at Rome to find out who it is the Holy Ghost has decided to make the next Pope. It seems a bit astonishing that men of any reflection at all should make such a confession; but, then, what can they or could they do? There is no method of settling the points in dispute; they cannot possibly be settled; and, I suppose voting is as good a way as any of performing the farce which pretends to solve questions which are in their nature insoluble. But the Revisers should have been candid enough to tell the world plainly that their work was nothing but a farce, a farce of the solemn kind, no doubt, and one mixed up with prayer and other magic ceremonies; but really a farce of the worst description.

Let us see where we now are. The Revisers of 1881 had set aside the Old Greek Text as of no authority; but they put no authoritative one in its room. So we are now without any Greek text that has authority. True, Drs. Hort and Westcott tried to palm off a Greek Testament of their own manufacture upon their fellow Revisers; and they seem to have succeeded admirably.

I have said that the Revisers of 1881 set aside the Old Greek Testament, which the translators of the common Bible called the

“original Greek” in 1611, and substituted for it a Greek text manufactured by Drs. Westcott and Hort, two of the Revisers.

This conduct would have been quite honest and proper, if the Revisers had only been so happy as to have discovered a better and more reliable text; but had they? It appears that some scholars as pious as themselves and not less learned, are of opinion that the Revisers really set aside a good text for a much worse one, as a few notes and quotations will make clear to the reader.

The Rev. Canon Cook, in *The Revised Version Considered*, London, 1882, earnestly defends the old Greek against the new. I think he makes out a good case against the new text, but he leaves us completely in the dark as to the value of the old. He demonstrates that the new idol of the Revisers is not the right and proper object of worship; but he fails to establish any claims for the old one. He prefers the old Greek used by the translators of 1611, but his preference seems to be more a matter of taste than argument.

Mr. Cook admits that the manuscripts relied upon by the Revisers are very ancient; but he contends that, “in the earliest ages the stupidity and licence of copyists was far greater than at any later period, the result being that the most ancient manuscripts are tainted with the most numerous and most serious errors” (p. 7).

This is extremely encouraging! If the oldest scribes were such clumsy copyists or such wilful corrupters, and from them has descended to us “the divine word,” as we have it, of what use or authority can it be? Manifestly none.

The modern critics cannot be relied on either. Tischendorf, the greatest of them all, it is said, produced several editions of his Greek New Testament. After he found the Sinaitic Manuscript, in 1859, he was so full of its importance that he set to work and produced a new edition of his Greek Testament, differing in more than 3,000 places from his previous edition. But, as Mr. Cook says, the larger portion of these changes have been given up as untenable by editors who have followed Tischendorf (p. 8).

And so the solemn farce of supplying us with “God’s word” proceeds from folly to folly, each successive editor overturning the work of his predecessors. What Mr. Cook says of two contending critics who came to ink and paper blows over the question, is instructive. He says, “I cannot but regard Dean Burgon’s argument on one side, and Dr. Hort’s on the other, as remarkable instances of the use and the misuse of vast learning and of equally remarkable subtlety” (p. 147).

I think the same remark will apply to all the ablest works on theology. No learning, no subtlety can settle a single point in it. And, in truth—I speak from experience and long study—the more learning is brought to bear upon any theological dogma, the more hopeless does it become. The modern critics have fallen into the terrible mistake of trying to prove their doctrines by reason or rational processes. They forget that, not reason, but the blindest of blind faith is the only saving virtue, the only way by which a man can receive the Gospel. Wordly wisdom, that is, enlightened reason, has nothing to do with it. You must, as when taking a

header into the sea, shut your eyes and plunge! To wait for reason to lead faith or to confirm faith is to be a Sceptic and to reject the whole of Christianity as an unreasonable superstition.

I quote next a few important passages from *The Revision Revised*, by John William Burgon, B.D., Dean of Chichester. London, 1883.

Let the reader remember that our Revisers of 1881 discarded the old Greek Testament as of no authority. This fact must be remembered all through. And so must the other, namely, that Drs. Hort and Westcott manufactured a new Greek Testament and induced the Revisers to accept that as God's most holy word. The Bishop of Gloucester accepts the new text and defends it. Dr. Scrivener, says Burgon, held that this new text was based on "the sandy ground of ingenious conjecture".....that the work of the new editors must be received by a sort of intuition or "dismissedas precarious or even visionary"....."Dr. Hort's system is entirely destitute of historical foundation".....and of "all probability."

So the reader sees where we are—The Revisers repudiate the old text and cannot induce the best scholars to accept their new one! The Revisers say, in effect, "Ladies and Gentlemen, you have innocently believed that the Bible you are so familiar with is God's most holy word, translated from the original. We are sorry to tell you it is nothing of the kind. The book from which this translation was made is of no authority whatsoever, we assure you, Ladies and Gentlemen! But do not be alarmed. We have found two manuscripts, the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, both preserved by the mysterious providence of God, which also raised us up to study and to set them before the world. And by patching together these two famous manuscripts, with quite a multitude of others, we have, by divine assistance, produced, or rather, reproduced, the word of God in as correct and elegant a style as the resources of scholarship and piety combined can ever hope to produce it, and as near to the original as the most fastidious piety can demand."

Such, in plain language, is the position taken up by the Revisers. But, unfortunately, just as they reject the old text, so do other scholars reject their new one; and the unhappy Christians are left without any word of God at all; and the wisest of the godly scholars can merely grip this or that text in sheer desperation; for reason and science declare that not one of them is of any authority whatsoever.

Burgon says, the Greek text on which the Revisionists spent ten years "was a wholly untrustworthy performance; was full of the gravest errors from beginning to end." It is "the most vicious (text) in existence." It was also smuggled into the Revisionists' camp and palmed off upon the members.

The two chief manuscripts used by the fabricators of the new text differ immensely from the old text. In the Gospels alone, the Vatican manuscript differs in 7,578 places; and the Sinaitic in 8,972 places. This manuscript has been tampered with no less

than ten different times between the 6th and 12th centuries: (p. 12).

Burton grows jocular, and declares that if Shakespeare were to be revised as the Bible has been, Hamlet's Soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," etc., would read thus:—The Alexandrine Manuscript:—Toby, or not Toby; that is the question. The Vatican Manuscript:—Tob or not, is the question. The Sinaitic Manuscript:—To be a Tub, or not to be a Tub; the question is that. Ephrem's Manuscript:—The question is, to beat, or not to beat Toby? Beza's Manuscript:—The only question is this: to beat that Toby, or to be a Tub" (p. 15).

No doubt exists in the mind of anyone acquainted with Hebrew or Greek that, if the authors of the Bible could be resurrected, they would find hundreds of texts quite as ridiculously represented and as fully muddled as the Shakespeare text just given. Could the ancient authors of these holy books be found and consulted, how astonished would they feel at the marvellous changes made in their works, and most especially at the meanings now attached to their words.

Let the reader reflect, that no two men, born in the same place, speaking the same language and educated in the same school, can ever fully understand each other. Two men, all their lives in diverse conditions, are still less able to comprehend each other. But let thousands of years intervene between the writer of a book and his reader, not to mention the fact that their languages are so different, how can the latter comprehend the former? most especially so if it is extremely doubtful what the author wrote?

Even if the so-called God's book had been preserved just as it was first written, with a full vocabulary of all the words and a perfect grammar, even then a perfect understanding would have been impossible in our day; and the farther removed we were from the times and conditions of the authors, the greater and greater would become the impossibility of understanding the work—of putting ourselves *en rapport* with those who wrote it.

The case of the Bible is immeasurably worse than that; for we know not who wrote a line of it; nor what was his motive; nor his circumstances; nor his opinions; nor his moral and social character; nor his knowledge of things; and, worse still, so imperfectly have his words descended to us, that the best scholarship can never decide what he did or did not write.

Burton proceeds to say that the Sinaitic, the Vatican, and the Beza manuscripts—those mostly relied upon by the Revisers—are the "most scandalously corrupt copies extant:—exhibit the most shamefully mutilated texts which are anywhere to be met with.....the depositories of the largest amount of *fabricated readings*, ancient *blunders*, and *intentional perversions of truth*," etc. (p. 6).

He proceeds to criticise the leading editors or manufacturers of Greek Testaments. Lachmann, who put out a Greek Testament about 90 years ago, which was based on three or four manuscripts

only; Tregelles,* who spent his life upon this kind of work, rejected 89 out of every 90 manuscripts, and manufactured his edition of the "Word of God" out of the remainder. Upon Tischendorf, Burgon is especially severe; though one can scarcely see why. The fact is, New Testament Textual Criticism is a game rather than a Science—an art, certainly it is—the art of thimblerrigging, of finding solutions for insoluble puzzles, of making out a case where there is none. Taste, prejudice, envy of other critics, love of fame, dogmatism, narrow-mindedness, perversity, monomania, pet ideas, religious fervor, callousness, and many other petty principles, prompt and guide the critic in his work. Never was there a field of inquiry so well adapted to develop all the crooked elements of one's nature—except the field occupied by the popish priests and especially the Jesuits. Indeed, all the leading elements of Jesuitry find ample employment in this department of manufacture—the manufacture of different versions and editions of that unspeakable sham, "God's Holy Word." Common sense, if that were allowed to influence them, would demonstrate to them the impossibility of a man, who is dominated by a creed and by pious prejudices, ever coming to rational and candid conclusions in such an inquiry. Such people can never deal honestly with the Bible, for blind, stubborn prejudice, sways them at every step. Their eternal salvation, so they solemnly believe, depends upon their arriving at certain foregone conclusions. Those pious "critics" deserve no more respect than performing animals in a circus. They may be clever and amusing, but their whole performance is automatic and preordained by their antecedents and environment.

Here before me lies *The History of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament* by Eduard (Wilhelm Eugen) Reuss; Edinburgh, 1884; and what says it respecting the manuscripts? The following quotations will show.

"The original copies of the New Testament books.....do not appear to have remained in existence long. On account of the poor quality of the paper, they must soon have become unfit for use and finally have been lost, even if they were not destroyed sooner by violence and neglect. **IT IS CERTAIN THAT NO ANCIENT WRITER MAKES MENTION OF THEM**" (p. 367).

This quotation gives us the whole case. 1. The books were written on poor paper! Well, then, probably they were to a great extent illegible from the beginning; and hence would arise the confusion we find in the Gospels, etc., that have descended to us. 2. But would the Holy Ghost have been such an absolute fool as to permit his writings or inspirations, intended to remain as a permanent guide to man, to be written on such flimsy stuff! To suppose so, is to fling contempt upon the Holy Ghost. 3. Would inspired men act so idiotically? Would men who supposed they were writing divine revelation be likely to put it upon such fragile stuff?

* It is boasted of Tregelles that he devoted 30 years to examining manuscripts, etc., worked himself blind at it. Well, Du Chat spent 40 years on the works of Rabelais! Tastes differ. Rabelais is less evil, a million-fold, than the Bible.

5. Would those who first received this divine truth be likely to permit accident or time to destroy its vehicle, not to mention destruction by violence?

The books of the Sibyl, kept so long in ancient Rome, were not written upon such perishable material. The revelations of Egypt and Chaldæa were recorded on clay tablets (say, pottery), and on stone; and are as sound and strong to-day as they were several thousand years ago. How was it the Holy Ghost or his agents were so much more careless or foolish than the Pagan writers? Uninspired men have always been wiser, if not so cunning as the fellows inspired by God.

If no ancient writer mentions the original copies of the New Testament, of what value can it be? Absolutely none. This statement of Reuss (and other Christian critics) is an admission that Christianity is not historical, that the New Testament is a forgery; for had the writers been known, those who received the books from their authors must have named or recorded so interesting and important a fact. Reflect upon the case. Some eight or nine authors are alleged to have contributed their quota to the New Testament, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude. Is it not a most singular thing that no one of their contemporaries should have mentioned the interesting fact that they were inspired, or authorised to write this or that portion of the New Testament? Is it not astounding that no one should mention the fact that he received a given portion of the New Testament from the author's own hand?

I feel sure that this negative evidence, when carefully weighed by thoughtful people, must prove absolutely fatal to the claims of the New Testament.

Reuss refers to the well-known tales of finding the autographs of John at Ephesus in the fourth century; and in the foundations of the Temple of Jerusalem, in Julian's day; of Matthew in the grave of Barnabas in Cyprus, etc., and stigmatises them as fables. Still, fables though the tales certainly are, they are instructive, although Reuss fails to note that. Those fables show that ancient Christian authors were puzzled and troubled about the originals and could not imagine how it was that their predecessors had not mentioned them. And the fables were invented to fill the painful gap and satisfy the anxious inquiries of the faithful.

Reuss goes on to discuss the variations in existing manuscripts, and says, the farther we go back in the history of the text the more arbitrary do we find the treatment of it by transcribers—that is, in plain English, the early copiers took great liberties with what they copied, and the farther we go back the more of such liberties do we find. Nay, the Apostles themselves, or their amanuenses "may have made mistakes"; and "the question comes whether the text ever existed in complete purity at all, and in what sense" (p. 370).

If one had lighted upon this in very early life, it must have taken his breath away, considering how confidently his teachers had assured him that the Word of God was perfect, and that the writers wrote with an unerring hand.

Reuss says the changes so very early introduced into the text of the New Testament "were doubtless, for the most part, such as were designed for its improvement" (p. 371).

Of one thing I am certain, no man who really supposed and devoutly believed he was reading God's inspired word could have tried to improve it. Only a doubter or confirmed disbeliever in its divine authority could have done that.

If the changes were introduced purposely to improve the books, then so long as this continued to be done, the books could not have been considered binding, infallible, etc.

If the copyists improved, we ask, To what extent did they do so? Did they leave out whole sentences, sections, books? Did they invent, borrow, and insert to equal extent? And how do you know to what degree the "original" New Testament differed from the present? Alas for orthodoxy! No means exist for settling that most essential matter.

Reuss even suggests that some of the readings in the New Testament are due to "freaks of fancy," although they may be "only blunders" (p. 372). Well, when the Holy Ghost is inspiring a man to write and blunders occur, or "freaks of fancy" display themselves in the writing, whose blunders, etc. are they? The Ghost's or his Clerk's? I wish the critics would settle *that*.

My Christian author proceeds. Alterations, he says, were made for enrichment; the Gospels were enriched by traditional matter; they were also purposely made more like each other, and quotations from the Old Testament, *which had been wrongly quoted*, were corrected! Other writers wrote their thoughts or comments in the margin of their manuscripts, and these were, by-and-bye, copied into the text. Look at our *fac-simile* on a former page, where kata markon is seen in the lower margin. That might have been copied into the text by the next scribe, as many words have been in the New Testament manuscripts now in existence.

This writer admits that, not the New Testament, but tradition, decided matters of faith in the early Church; and therefore the book was in danger of being altered to suit the tradition. Then he refers to the frequent mention in early writers of wilful corruptions of the text for controversial purposes. In this connection he shows up the unscrupulous characters of the orthodox church fathers, apparently forgetting that in so doing he damns most effectually the only witnesses for Christianity. In fact, no Christian critic can traverse the ground of New Testament history without making statements altogether fatal to the claims of his superstition. (See pp. 375-6).

I must call attention to the several *fac-similes*. The manuscripts are all written without breaks or points. Reuss says, "Aside from the general scarcity of books, reading was rendered difficult for the unpractised by the total lack of all explanatory pointing. It was not until the close of the ninth century, after isolated attempts in earlier times, that copyists generally introduced the breathings and accents into the copies of the New Testament. A still greater hindrance to the easy reading of the text was the custom of writing without breaks between the words. "THIS GAVE OCCASION FOR

MANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MUCH THEOLOGICAL WRANGLING " (p. 386).

It is not every Christian critic who will speak so plainly as Reuss. To see how awkward it is to read without spaces and stops, take the same passage which appears in the *fac-simile* 1, this time in English capitals and without any stops or spaces.

ANDTHEYSAIDAMONGTHEMSELVESWHOSHALL
ROLLUSAWAYTHESTONEFROMTHEDOOROFTHE
SEPULCHREANDWHENTHEYLOOKEDTHEYSAW
THATTHESTONEWASROLLEDAWAYFORITWASV
ERYGREATANDENTERINGINTOTHESEPULCHRE
THEYSAWAYOUNGMANSITTINGONTRIGHTSI
DECLOTHEDINALONGWHITEGARMENTANDTHE
YWEREAFFRIGHTEDANDHESAITHUNTOTHEMB
ENOTAFFRIGHTEDYESEEKJESUSOFNAZARETH
WHICHWASCRUCIFIEDHEISRISENHEISNOTHE
REBEHOLDTHEPLACEWHERTHEYLAIDHIMBU
TGOYOURWAYTELLHISDISCIPLESANDPETER
HATHEGOETHBEFOREYOUINTOGALILEETHER
ESHALLYESEEHIMASHESAIDUNTOYOUANDTHE
YWENTOUTQUICKLYANDFLEDFROMTHESEPUL
CHREFORTHEYTREMBLEDANDWEREAMAZEDN
EITHERSAIDTHEYANYTHINGTOANYMANFORTH
EYWEREAFFRAID

As the old written letters are not half so well formed as our printed ones, it must have been all the harder to read them correctly.

Though the manuscripts, says Reuss, are our best sources of knowledge of the original New Testament, yet they can never vouch for the correctness of any reading, because they were all written after the text was corrupted.

Hear again: "the age of a text is only determined with great difficulty and little certainty, from a comparison of many manuscripts," etc. (p. 387).

In all this Reuss confirms what I have so often said. He also confirms me in reference to the versions of the Bible, by pointing out that an ancient version needs to be proved itself before it can be used as a witness for the text (p. 404).

Reuss openly admits that all attempts to restore the New Testament text to its original purity have failed, and must ever fail (p. 445).

That is the plain truth about the matter; and when the clergy are honest enough to prefer truth to place and pay they will say the same.

No doubt the reader is about tired of this subject; but I must say a little more.

The New Testament is of unknown origin, unknown date, unknown birthplace, unknown authorship. There is not a single question about its history, for the alleged first two or three centuries of its existence, which can be answered. Let us ask a few. Who wrote the Four Gospels? History does not say. What authority

had they? The writers do not tell us. Were they eye-witnesses? Manifestly not, for they never profess to be. Are they known? Not at all; only one of the Gospels pretends to be written by any particular person. When was any one of them written? No one knows. In what language? No one knows. On what material? No one can tell.

What Church first possessed a Gospel? History gives no reply. When and where did the Gospels first circulate? We cannot tell. What language were they (or any one of them) first written in? No scholar can answer that question. What became of the original manuscripts? No one reports ever seeing one of them.

The probability is that the New Testament is a set of monkish books or pamphlets, written for edification—that is, to rouse religious or devotional feelings, not to instruct. The stories in the New Testament were probably never regarded as true when first written; they were a sort of parables, allegories, tales, intended to convey some lesson or to stir devotion. Those who first told or wrote the tales could never have supposed they were relating sober facts, and would doubtless be abundantly astonished if they could know how solemnly scholars brood over their ridiculous tales, and try to make biography and history out of them.

The New Testament is no more true than the Mythological stories of Greece and Rome; than the *Gesta Romanorum*; than the lives of the popish saints and martyrs; than the multitudinous stories of saints and miracles found so plentifully in the Bible itself and in so-called Church history. When *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Arabian Nights* have been proved to be history, I, for one, shall be prepared to accept the New Testament also.

So long as it is a merit to believe the impossible, I suppose the impossible stories of the New Testament will continue to be swallowed by people of a gulping disposition. But of one thing we may be certain, and that is, reason never swallowed the *Arabian Nights* or the *New Testament*; and never can.

I will quote a few brief passages from *Hug's Introduction to the New Testament*; Andover (U.S.), 1836. This is Professor Moses Stuart's edition. The work is a learned one, and rather advanced for its date.

Hug says (pp. 68-9), "These books (New Testament ones), when once circulated among the multitude, encountered all the fortunes which have befallen other works of antiquity.....Only the original writings possessed an authority beyond objection, and we might hence expect that peculiar care would have been taken to preserve them to posterity. Yet we have no CERTAIN INFORMATION WHERE THEY WERE KEPT, how long they were to be seen, or by what accident they were lost to the world. For those passages of the ancients which have been supposed to communicate information respecting the autographs have in fact a totally different purport."....."We have the most irrefutable proof.....that Tertullian, and not only he, but Clement, Origen, and the fathers of the Church generally, knew nothing of the existence of the autographs, in all those works in which they combat the heretics."

He goes on to show that the "Fathers" disputed with the heretics as to how certain texts of the New Testament ought to read. If they had known where to find the originals, those disputes could have been settled at once. But they never appealed to the originals; and the only inference possible is that the "Fathers" never knew those originals.

In truth, this confession is equal to giving up the whole case for Christianity. If none of the early writers saw the originals of the New Testament, or ever referred to them, it is idle to dispute further; perfectly idle. The book is out of court as a nameless, fatherless waif, a vagabond who can give no account of himself, except to say, "Here I am; I don't know what I am; I don't know where I came from; don't know any of my family relations; can't tell what country I belong to; and I don't know anything about my age."

"Thus we seek in vain for the original manuscripts at a time when nothing was known of them. They were lost, without so much as a hint to us by what means a possession so important to the Church perished. How shall we explain this singular fact?" (Hug, pp. 67-70).

Hug does not explain it, nor can it be explained, except to the damage of Christianity. People do not carelessly lose or destroy Wills, Scrip, Bills of Sale, Debentures, and other valuable documents. And the original Gospels, etc., according to Church sentiment, were worth infinitely more than all other documents whatsoever. Yet they are never mentioned by any Church writer!

Here is a thought that just this moment strikes me. Relics were venerated or worshipped very early in the Church. In fact, we cannot suppose there ever was a time when they were not. Well, the Church has preserved—so silly fables and impudent lies assure us—the "holy coat" that Jesus wore; the cross and its nails; the Veronica napkin, and a crowd of other early relics. How shall we explain the strange fact that the Church preserved neither the original books of the New Testament, nor ever pretended to have them? How is it that such precious relics were never counterfeited as most others were?

There is but one reply, and that is, the New Testament never became a precious book until the age of counterfeiting or manufacturing relics had passed its prime, and it was too late to set up the original manuscripts for worship, too late to manufacture them. Indeed, until the Reformation the Bible held but a very subordinate position; and its monstrous claims since that date were invented and pushed merely to checkmate Popery. Popery had the Infallibility of the Pope, or of the Church, or something, and the Reformers set up a counter Infallibility in the Bible. Up to that date the Bible had been little, or no better, or more authoritative, than other holy fable books, and certainly had never reached the value or importance of a chip of the cross, or other relics that might be named.

This reflection, properly worked out, is quite sufficient in itself to destroy the whole value of the Bible—except as a mere antiquity.

As an antiquity, its value is assured. As a divine book, it is utterly beneath contempt.

Here is another instructive selection from Hug's work:—"The fate which has befallen other works of antiquity, befel the New Testament likewise" (p. 85). The carelessness of copyists produced errors. "But this is not all; the New Testament has had the peculiar fate of suffering more by intentional alterations than the works of profane literature."

Yet Christians will often proclaim the empty and impudent boast that the New Testament has far better evidence to connect it with the Apostles, etc., than any ancient profane book has to show that it was written by its reputed author. Read again the last quotation from Hug, who proceeds to say the heretics had no hand in the wilful alterations. In fact, he shows that the orthodox slandered Marcion and other heretics by charging upon them corruptions of the New Testament, which were perpetrated in the orthodox camp itself! That will not surprise any who understand what modern Christian malice and lying are constantly doing.

In the first four centuries, says Hug, "Strange things had happened in individual manuscripts" (p. 86). He says Origen complained much of the wilful corruptions before his day.

I think I need not continue this subject; for I have said enough in these quotations and notes to destroy all faith in the New Testament. And when we add the fact that the New Testament carries its own damnation upon almost every page, the reader will understand how baseless is the Christian superstition. The New Testament bristles with fables, superstitions, and impossibilities. No amount of evidence could ever prove it historical or help towards that end. The Christians themselves would scout all the fables of the New Testament as I do, if they found them related in connection with any other religion than their own.

In conclusion, I may say that never was a greater failure than is shown in the long-continued attempts to decide what is, what is not, divine revelation. All such attempts have but demonstrated: 1. that the New Testament (I am dealing only with that just now) is of unknown origin and date. 2. That it has no authority at all beyond what blind custom, blind prejudice, tyranny, or a majority vote imparts to it. 3. That all the scholars in the world are not able to decide how any text of the New Testament *originally* ran. This is literally true. 4. The result of the 300 years' labor and expense bestowed by Christians upon this book is to dissipate for ever all rational claims on its behalf and to explode the entire authority of the Churches. In one word, it has left us destitute of all Christian revelation and of all rational grounds for belief in such a thing.

To the Freethinker this is satisfactory. It blows away a world of cant, hypocrisy, and clerical impudence and tyranny.

For ages, from Bentley onward, the Christians boasted that, though the New Testament manuscripts differed from each other in 30,000 (Bentley's admission) places, or 150,000 (as later times show) not one doctrine of Christianity was affected by them! That boast

is the condensed essence of impudence or of ignorance. For the variations and other facts combined, strip the Churches of the book itself upon which they founded all their pretence and all their doctrine. Textual Criticism has undermined and blown up the entire fabric of Christianity and left it destitute of any plausible excuse for continuing to exist, except blind custom and—cash.

If they deny what I say, let them at once inform us on what authority they receive the life of Jesus and the rest of the incidents and doctrines of the New Testament. Let them say on what and whose authority they receive the New Testament itself. And, lastly, let them tell us what the New Testament *is*—I mean, whether all the books now in it ought to be there, whether none other should be inserted; and on what manuscripts or other evidence they rely.

Most confidently I deny their ability to meet these demands. And therefore I assert that Christianity, in itself, is a gross and irrational superstition. As it is put before the world, it is the worst imposture that could be conceived.

APPENDIX.

FINALLY, in the *Athenæum*, June 16, I am gratified to find the fullest confirmation of my views, the most complete justification of the strongest opinions I have expressed above. The reader may remember that I quoted the work of Rev. H. A. Scrivener, M.A., D.D., etc. That gentleman was confessedly and by common consent one of the most sober and reliable critics in this department of learning, not brilliant, but solid and thoughtful. Since his death (just recently, in fact), there is issued a work of his entitled *Adversaria Critica Sacra*, which the *Athenæum* reviews. In fairness to all parties I quote all the critic says upon the subject:—

“ These *Adversaria Critica Sacra* consist of collations of forty-nine MSS. of portions of the New Testament, Six MSS. containing fragments of the Septuagint and a record of the variations from the *Textus Receptus* of the principal early editions of the New Testament. A minute and accurate account is given of each MS. It is needless to say that Dr. Scrivener did his work with the utmost conscientiousness, and that his labors are of great value, and deserve the heartiest recognition from all Biblical scholars. He made no effort to determine how far his new collations will modify the text of the New Testament, but throughout the book there runs a current of opposition to the principles laid down by Hort in his *Introduction to the New Testament in the original Greek*, edited by him and Bishop Westcott. It begins in a note on p. vi. of the *Introduction*, in which Dr. Scrivener states that Dean Burgon

‘ Had been engaged day and night for years in making a complete index or view of the manuscripts used by the Nicene (and ante-Nicene) Fathers, by way of showing that they were not identical with those copied in the Sinaitic and Vatican codices, and inasmuch as they were older, they must needs be purer and more authentic than these overvalued uncials.’ ”

In a postscript to the *Introduction*, Dr. Scrivener says that Dean Burgon

“ Very earnestly requested me that if I lived to complete the present work, I would publicly testify that my latest labors had in no wise modified my previous critical convictions, namely, that the true text of the New Testament can best and most safely be gathered from a comprehensive acquaintance with every source of information yet open to us, whether they be manuscripts of the original text, Versions, or Fathers, rather than from a partial representation of three or four authorities, which, though in date the more ancient and akin in character, cannot be made even tolerably to agree together.”

Dr. Scrivener renews his avowal, and illustrates it by an instance. The opinion comes out most strongly in the words of Mr. Hoskier, who collated Evan. 604 for Dr. Scrivener. Dr. Scrivener says:—

“ Mr. Hoskier's conclusion shall be given in his own words: ‘ I defy any one after having carefully perused the foregoing lists, and

after having noted the almost incomprehensible combinations and permutation of both the uncial and cursive Manuscripts, to go back again to the teaching of Dr. Hort with any degree of confidence. How useless and superfluous to talk of Evan. 604 having a *large western element* or of it *Siding in many places with the neutral text*. The whole question of families and recensions is thus brought prominently before the eye, and with space we could largely comment upon the deeply interesting combinations which thus present themselves to the critic. But *do* let us realise that we are in the infancy of this part of the Science.....and not imagine that we have successfully laid certain immutable foundation stones, and can safely continue to build thereon. It is not so; much, if not all, of these foundations must be demolished.....It has cost me a vast amount of labor and trouble to prepare this statement of evidence with any degree of accuracy; but I am sure it is worth while, and I trust that it may stimulate others to come to our aid, and also help to annul much of Dr. Hort's erroneous theories.'"

Such is the quotation from the *Athenæum*. I have stated in the pamphlet that the translators of the Authorised Version declared they translated from the "original"—which was a lie. For two centuries and a half this falsehood has been imposed upon most English speaking Bible readers. When the Revised Version was made, the so-called "original" of the old translators was set aside in favor of a Greek text manufactured by Dr. Hort and the present Bishop of Durham. In the above quotation, the reader will see how thoroughly Dr. Scrivener, as well as Dr. Burgon, repudiates the Hort-Westcott Greek text.

But reflect. One set of critics flings up one Greek text another flings up another!

I must once more solemnly affirm that anything like certainty in Greek Testament criticism is impossible—except the damning certainty that it is impossible to discover whence the New Testament came, or to find the history of any of the manuscripts.

Criticism, even as conducted by Christian critics, has proved Christianity to be unhistorical and the New Testament of unknown authorship and date.—*Liberator*, Melbourne, August 11, 1894.

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