

*SOME TEXTUAL CONJECTURES IN VERIFIABLE MATERIAL*

THE layman is apt to imagine that the Classical or Biblical critic exercises the art of textual conjecture in circumstances of pleasing irresponsibility. He can take what liberties he chooses with the text, and there is no one to say him nay. Certainly, he is not likely to be confronted—unless perchance he be a member of the *Psychical Research Society*—with any absolutely indisputable authority. But the critic himself of course knows only too well that the supposed irresponsibility is illusory. For when he has evolved and elaborated his conjecture, and based it upon argument, and flanked it with analogies, and sent it forth under the escort of a magazine article, or entrenched it in the apparatus of a new edition, then there comes :—

“Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,  
The judgment of his peers!”

A conjecture which has run the gauntlet of expert criticism, and is finally approved by a consensus of scholarship, acquires, indeed, something not very remote from certainty. Still, it is not to be denied that the discovery of a manuscript, superior in age or pedigree to those previously known, which actually confirmed his conjecture, would give the critic a peculiar thrill of pleasure, and the public, at any rate, a new respect for his skill. Now, a perfectly definite confirmation, so rare in Classical or Biblical matters, is open to any critic who has occasion to exercise the art of conjecture on the works of a living author. It is not often perhaps worth any one's while to seek it. Conjectural emendation is no doubt practised, as the margins of library books bear painful witness, but it is rarely, one fancies, that the critic thinks any confirmation of his superior wisdom

necessary. It so happens, however, that lately, in the course of translating two German books, I have had occasion both to make some conjectures, and to seek confirmation of them. Any interest that belongs to the examples which I am about to give arises from this fact, that they have been put to the test, proved right or wrong. Some of the least certain-seeming were right, some of the most plausible were wrong; that is perhaps not the least instructive feature of the case. There is just one thing more to be said before we come to the examples. As there seems perhaps a certain presumption in assuming the presence of misprints in a scholar's book, I ought to premise that I knew from the author of one of the books that the final stages of its preparation had taken place under great pressure of other work, and in the case of the other, one or two quite unmistakable printers' errors—reversal of letters and so forth—showed that the printer, at any rate, was not impeccable. When, therefore, in one of these works, I came on the following statement, I was not prepared to accept it without question as conveying the author's meaning.

“Reuss lässt die juridischen Gedanken hinter den ethischen ganz zurücktreten; bei Ménégöz kommen die letzteren stärker zur Geltung als die ersteren.”

(Reuss makes the juridical ideas entirely subordinate to the ethical; in Ménégöz the latter are more strongly emphasised than the former.)

Now the statement as it stands is perfectly intelligible. It amounts to this—that the second author's views coincide in general with those of the first. But if that is the meaning, it is expressed with an extraordinary amount of verbiage; the second part of the sentence is a paraphrase of the first in the style of a penny-a-liner. And our author—such general considerations become of extreme importance in a case of this kind—is a peculiarly trenchant and vigorous

writer. It is hardly possible that he can have said anything so inept. Moreover the form of the sentence is at variance with its meaning. The semicolon, the paratactic arrangement of the clauses, suggest an antithesis; and the contrast of two directly opposite views would have just the right touch of literary crispness. To restore the antithesis it is only necessary to suppose that 'former' and 'latter' have changed places—a notoriously easy slip to make. Supposing a study of the facts to show that the antithesis between the two authors' views actually exists, as it does, the case would, I think, be beyond doubt, even in the absence of external verification. The author, as a matter of fact, confirmed.

Our next example, from the other author, is also a case of a "miss-fire" antithesis.

"So ferne man nun nach *objektiven* Normen und Sicherstellungen gegen die bloss *objective* Willkür suchte, bot sich als einziges Mittel die Wissenschaft dar."

(When objective standards and fixed points were sought, to purely objective caprice, science offered itself as the only resource.)

Here "subjective" caprice at once suggests itself as the natural correlative of "objective standards." Moreover, an "objective caprice" hardly conveys any intelligible meaning. The only thing that gave me pause was that the passage occurred on an early page, of a small book, which had reached a second *and revised* edition. Was it possible that, if the word was wrong, author and proof-reader could twice have overlooked it? The case was parallel to that where a manuscript bears traces of having been gone through by a *diorthotes*, and yet where what would seem a very obvious error has been left uncorrected. But if you catch your *diorthotes* tripping in one simple instance he may do it again, and, as I have said, there were elsewhere in the

book one or two small but quite unmistakable printer's errors. On the whole I thought that, in spite of its having shown such powers of survival, there was very little doubt that "objective" was out of place in its environment; and so it turned out to be on application to the author.

The next instance is of a different character, and the main interest lies in the method of provisional verification adopted. Referring to the cult of Serapis, the author says:

"Seine Anhänger fanden sich hauptsächlich unter Sklaven und *Freigeborenen*."

(Its adherents were found chiefly among (the) slaves and free-born.) At first sight one is inclined to say that "slaves and free-born" includes the whole population, and that the remark is, therefore, as it stands, quite pointless. This has to be modified to the extent that there was at Rome a third class, that of the freedmen; but that does not make the text any easier, for it is hardly conceivable that this particular form of expression has been deliberately adopted in order to exclude that class. In fact what we expect is precisely "slaves and freedmen"—these were the classes which in such a connexion would be likely to be associated. There was still a possibility, however, which had to be considered before the text was definitely rejected. 'Freigeborene' might conceivably be used in a special technical sense—the sons of freedmen, born after their fathers' enfranchisement. But (1) I could find no trace of such a usage, and (2) it would be very strange that this class should be associated with the slaves, while the intervening class of freedmen was omitted. These probabilities being excluded, we naturally conjecture "freigelassene," freedmen; and it would not be difficult for a printer to make a carelessly written "freigelassene" into the more familiar "freigeborene." But we feel, I think, the need of some further confirmation. Fortunately this was procurable. From certain indications

in the context it appeared probable that the author, who does not pretend to write on these matters from first-hand research, was here following Cumont's *Les Religions Orientales dans le Paganisme Romain*. I turned up the passage about the cult of Serapis in Cumont, and sure enough, I found the statement that its adepts were chiefly to be found among the "foule mêlée d'esclaves et d'affranchis (freedmen)." I said a moment ago that the finding of this confirmation was fortunate; for it happened that in answering my queries the author overlooked this one, and his letter arrived too late to admit of further correspondence. But I felt no conscientious scruples about inserting freedmen in the translation.

We come now to a pair of closely parallel instances, one from each of our two authors.

In each case there is, between text and conjecture, the mere difference of a letter. In each case the text gave quite a good sense, but had some slight "uncomfortableness" about it, while the change seemed, to the present writer at least, a distinct improvement. In the one case, however, the conjecture was right, in the other wrong. Let us take the latter first.

Speaking of St. Paul's relation to the Jewish Hellenistic theology, the author says: "Ihre Probleme, ihre Spekulationen über Logos, Geist und Weisheit, ihre Ethik, interessieren ihn nicht, ihre *Lösungen* benutzt er nicht."

(Its problems, its speculations regarding Logos, Spirit, Wisdom, its Ethic, do not interest him, its *solutions* are not used by him.)

It certainly seems a little odd to introduce "solutions" absolutely, like this; one expects a nearer connexion with problems or difficulties. Moreover the statement is logically otiose; if "its problems and speculations" do not interest him, it is hardly likely that he would have any

use for its solutions, for his own problems must have been different.

Now there is another word differing from *Lösungen* only by what is typographically less than a letter—a mere modification—which would have given a very natural sense here. That is “*Losungen*,” “watchwords,” which is freely used by German writers in the metaphorical sense of party cries or catch-words. “Its catch-words were not used by him”—one sees that it would go admirably. Nevertheless this plausible conjecture was wrong. *Lösungen*, not *Losungen* was what the author wrote.

Now for our parallel case. This is the passage: “Für den Protestantismus selber aber in allen seinen *Lagen* ist die ethische Stellung zu den durch Kapitalismus geschaffenen Verhältnissen ein schweres Problem geworden.” (For Protestantism itself in all its *situations*, its ethical attitude towards the conditions created by Capitalism has become a difficult problem.)

Now *Lagen* (positions, situations) strikes one as a little strange. Still, if you take it in the slightly generalised sense of “local circumstances.” “environments,” it seems quite possible. On the other hand a distinctly more natural meaning would be given by the insertion of one letter—“in allen seinen *Lagern*,” in all its camps, i.e. sections, parties.

This metaphorical use of *Lager* being very common, it seemed to me distinctly probable here, so I ventured—though rather tentatively, after my experience with *Losungen*—to suggest it, and it turned out to be right. I do not feel competent to draw any lesson—except the general one of caution—from a comparison of these two conjectures and their differing fate. One seems to me *a priori* as justifiable as the other.

Our last pair of instances is again closely parallel. In both cases the text is difficult—in one paradoxical. In both

cases an easy emendation suggests itself. In neither case is the emendation correct, the difficulty really arising from the fact that the meaning is not quite clearly expressed. Here is the first passage.

“Sowie man das Naturrecht verstand . . . konnte man dieses Strafrecht zugleich als Ausfluss des Naturrechts betrachten und mit den biblisch-alttestamentlichen Exempeln des ja auch im Alten Testament bezeugten Naturrechts belegen.”

(In view of the way in which they understood the Law of Nature (*Lex Naturae*), they could also regard this Criminal Law as issuing from the Law of Nature, and support it by the Biblical Old Testament examples of the Law of Nature, which is indeed itself (or, also) witnessed to in the Old Testament).

Apart from its context, the whole sentence is rather obscure, and it should perhaps be explained that “Law of Nature”—the reference to jurisprudence is unambiguous in the German—means “the order which, under the Divine providence, issues from reason and the natural course of things.” The appointments of Saul and of David to the kingship were regarded, the author explains later on, as examples of the working of this “Law of Nature.” The present passage means, generally, that punitive justice was regarded as a department of this Law of Nature, and therefore shared the support which Scripture gives to the latter. From the textual point of view what attracts attention is the curious repetition of “Old Testament.” When, in conjunction with this, we take the fact that the words “ja auch,” which the repetition of “Old Testament” forces us to refer to the subject of the clause, would more naturally belong to the predicate, with the meaning “which is indeed *also* testified to in (something else than the Old Testament), it becomes very tempting to conjecture “which is indeed

also testified to in the *New Testament*." This would be quite in accordance with the facts ; cf. Rom. xiii. 1 f., "The powers that are ordained of God," etc. And yet the conjecture is not correct. The author, with a fine modesty reminiscent of Dr. Johnson's famous answer when challenged about a mistake in his Dictionary, replied to my query, "This is not a Druckfehler (printer's error) but a Stilfehler (fault of style)," and requested me to omit, in translating, the first "Old Testament."

We come now to our final and, I think, most curious example.

"Die Apostelgeschichte . . . weiss nichts von einer Schriftstellerei des Paulus. Sie berichtet auch nichts von den Kämpfen *die durch diese Briefe*, wenn man ihrem Selbstzeugnis glauben will, hervorgerufen sein sollen."

(The Book of Acts knows nothing of any literary activity on the part of Paul. Nor does it tell us anything of the struggles which were called forth by these letters, if we are to believe their own evidence.)

Here it is internal probability of a general character which is against the text. I am inclined to think that nine out of ten New Testament scholars, reading the above sentence in a translation, would come to the conclusion that some one—probably the translator—had blundered. For, of course the prevailing impression is that it was the struggles which called forth the letters and not *vice versa*. Think of 1 Corinthians for example. Is it not quite evident that the controversy between the Paul, Apollos, and "Christ" parties was fully afloat when Paul wrote? And is not Galatians avowedly written to oppose an attack of the Judaisers?

This being so, what are the *textual* probabilities of slip or misprint? Is there any simple alteration which would change the meaning? It is at once obvious that there is,



We have only to reverse the words "die durch" into "durch die" to get the meaning "the struggles by which these letters, if we are to believe their own evidence, were called forth." On internal grounds there is, it must be said, just one objection to the alteration. Grammatically it is unexceptionable, but stylistically it is not quite satisfactory; I believe I am right in saying that cultured Germans give themselves some trouble to avoid "tautophonies" such as "durch *die diese*." Still, even with a careful writer an accidental awkwardness will occasionally slip through. On the whole it was with a good deal of confidence that I submitted the passage to the author as probably in some way unsound. Nevertheless the text was correct. I was about to say, the text represents the author's meaning, but that would not be strictly accurate. In confirming the text, he wrote me that, according to his view, in the case, for instance, of the Galatian troubles, it was the letter which "die Kontroverse erst recht entfacht hat" (which first set the controversy fully ablaze). This is no doubt an intelligible view, but it is not quite what the text says, for "hervorgerufen" points, just as definitely as the English "called forth," to the actual beginning of the matter, whereas the "erst recht" is a distinct admission that the controversy was already smouldering.

It would, of course, be absurd to generalise from a pair of instances. They may, however, perhaps serve as a text for a general reflection which has been borne in upon my mind from various quarters. I shall express it tentatively, thus: Are we not, in all historical criticism, too prone to rest content with the assumption that the logical thing is right? As a "methodological assumption" it is no doubt justified; but one feels that we ought to keep in the background of our minds a more vivid sense of that *subtilitas naturae* which so frequently evades formulated laws. And,

to close with a more particular application, it is probable that the writers of antiquity, like those of modern times, did not always express their meaning with the strictest possible accuracy.

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### LOVE THAT COVERS SINS

WE read in *i Peter* iv. 8, that "Love covereth a multitude of sins." The source whence these words are taken is *Prov.* x. 12, "Hatred stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all transgressions." The expression "cover a multitude of sins" occurs again as the closing words of the *Epistle of James* (v. 20), "He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."

The form in which *Peter* and *James* present the saying differs slightly from the original Hebrew and still more markedly from the LXX; and this suggests that we have here not a conscious quotation from the Book of Proverbs, but a saying in common use taken from an independent Greek translation of a text differing slightly from that of the Masora.

We need not spend time in refuting a common misunderstanding of the A.V. rendering in *Peter*,—"charity shall cover the multitude of sins"—as though it meant that amiability compensates for a great many moral shortcomings; though it is fair to say that the future tense "shall cover" for "covereth," read in the Received Text, which comes from *James*, rather favours this false exegesis.

Again, it is sufficient to mention, without elaborate refutation, a wrong turn that has been given to the passage just cited from *James*, "He which converteth a sinner from