SOME REMARKS ON THE TEXT OF APOCALYPSE III. 17.

STUDENTS of the text of the Apocalypse are familiar with a case of the "harder reading" in the letter to the Church at Laodicea, where the reading of the Vulgate and of the received text, οὐδενός χρείαν ἔχω, which is supported by the strong uncial combination ℵ B P (only note that this B is not the Vatican MS. which usually passes under that sign, but another which takes its place where the great Codex is wanting), is displaced by οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω, which is found in the uncials A and C, and has some very slight minuscule attestation. Certainly the latter reading, with its queer double accusative, is linguistically the more difficult, and it is not surprising, therefore, that it found its way into the texts of Tregelles, and Westcott and Hort, though Tischendorf adhered to the reading of the Textus Receptus (perhaps the dust from his own discovery had here, as elsewhere, blinded his eyes a little). Now Professor von Soden, in his recently published text of the New Testament, has gone back from οὐδέν of W.-H. and Tregelles to οὐδενός of Tischendorf and the Textus Receptus. My own inclination is altogether against this change, on a merely superficial study: but it seems that, for the very reason that the matter was assumed somewhat hastily to lie on the surface and not to require a closer analysis, some reason ought to be given for the preference of the "harder reading," beside the attraction of the word "harder." We may, for instance, find out, as the critical world grows older and wiser, that the "harder reading" is often a mere will o' the wisp. I propose, therefore, to examine the reading and the passage in which it occurs somewhat more closely. We will begin with an extract from Dr. Swete's com-

mentary on the Apocalypse; his note on Apoc. iii. 17 is as follows:

In οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω οὐδέν is the acc. of reference (cf. Blass, *Gr.* p. 94), or of content (ib. p. 91, where however the note should be cancelled); οὐδενός is an obvious correction, cf. 1 Thess. iv. 12.

Blass' note, to which Swete directs us for its erasure, will be found in the second edition of his *Grammar of the New Testament* at p. 93, and is as follows:

> Schwerlich richtig Ap. iii. 17 οὐδὲν (οὐδενὸς ℵBP) χρείαν ἔχω.

Here then we have the matter stated for us, Dr. Swete explaining that οὐδενός was a natural correction to the awkward οὐδέν, which latter must therefore be retained; while Blass, on the other hand, shakes his head, and prefers the better Greek of the received reading.

Now, in examining this problem carefully, we shall see that there are two directions in which fresh knowledge can be obtained with regard to the meaning of the passage, and so new light can be thrown on the textual problem; one of these directions is historical, and the other is grammatical and linguistic.

First of all, let us recall the historical situation which is the background for the supposed language of the Church of Laodicea: in the year A.D. 60, as we find from Tacitus (*Annals*, iv. 27), there was a terrible earthquake in Laodicea; upon this Tacitus remarks—

"Nullo nobis remedio, propriis opibus revaluit": the independence and wealth of the Laodiceans was such that, making no appeal for aid to the Roman Government, and perhaps even politely declining such aid, they rebuilt their city at the cost of the city itself. This is undoubtedly the situation, which provokes the censure in Apoc. iii. 17. I do not at the present moment recall who was the first to

adduce this illuminating sentence from Tacitus; I have long had it annotated on the margin of my New Testament, and in recent times it has been endorsed by Prof. Ramsay, who summed up the matter in his *Letters to the Seven Churches* in the following sentences:—[1]

"It is characteristic of a city devoted to commercial interests and the material side of life, that the Church of Laodicea is entirely self-satisfied. It says, as the city said in A.D. 60, when it recovered its prosperity after the great earthquake without any of that help which the Imperial government was generally ready to bestow, and which the greatest cities of Asia had always been ready to accept, "*I have grown rich, and have need of nothing.*" It has never seen its real condition: it is *poor and blind and naked.*"

It will be seen that Prof. Ramsay interprets the text (whether οὐδέν or οὐδενός) as meaning that the Laodiceans were in need of nothing: but it is just here that the historical parallel affects the argument: strictly speaking they were not in need of nothing; they were in need at every point where a wrecked city could call for assistance: what they said was that they had need of no one's help, not that they were out of need. This suggests οὐδενός in the personal sense, rather than οὐδέν in the neuter; and this suggestion of personal, outside help is confirmed by the words which follow, "I advise you to buy *of me*, etc." So far then the argument inclines to favour οὐδενός rather than οὐδέν: it is not decisive, because a person who wanted no help from outside might exaggerate his position or emphasise his self-sufficiency by saying that he was not in any need. The balance of the argument is, so far, in favour of von Soden's restoration of the reading of the textus receptus.

But now let us turn to the language itself, and see

[1] l.c. p. 428.

whether any further light can be obtained from that quarter. Let us assume for a moment that οὐδέν is the correct reading. In that case it certainly is not, as Swete and Blass suggested, an accusative of reference: *it is, in fact, the transitional form between the classical negative and the Modern Greek.* One of the things that strikes a student on hearing Modern Greek spoken for the first time is the replacement of οὐ and μὴ by δὲν; δὲν ἔχω (I have not), δὲν εἶνε (there isn't) show the survival of οὐδὲν in a form which cannot be called an accusative of reference. The transition is from οὐκ ἔχω to οὐδὲν ἔχω and then to δὲν ἔχω. That makes δὲν adverbial, whether it comes from οὐδέν or μηδέν.

To illustrate this point, let us take a Modern Greek translation of the New Testament, say such a text as that which was circulated by the British and Foreign Bible Society, a text which is merely the received text slightly modified to popular usage. We shall find that they present Apoc. iii. 17 as follows :—

καὶ δὲν ἔχω χρείαν οὐδενός καὶ δὲν ἐξευρεῖς, κτέ.

Here the οὐδέν of the MSS. has reappeared without the least intention of altering either reading or sense. We may, therefore, say that those texts which read οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω merely mean to say οὐ χρείαν ἔχω in a transitional manner, which would in the present day be replaced by δὲν χρείαν ἔχω. This way of looking at the matter may possibly justify us in reading οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω as meaning "I am not in need," but not in translating it "I am in need of nothing." If then the harder reading is to be justified, it should be by the recognition of οὐδέν as an adverbial negative. It is not quite clear to me whether this consideration is sufficient to turn the scale, but as there is always a premium on a reading which contains a

lost or unrecognized grammatical form (as for instance the indeclinable πληρής in John i. 14 and elsewhere), we may perhaps give a hesitating verdict in favour of Hort's reading.

Now let us turn from this passage in the Apocalypse to a suggestion made a little higher up, that the Modern Greek δὲν may represent μὴ as well as οὐ. In this case we ought to find the transitional μηδέν.

For example, there is a famous passage in the Gospel of Peter, which is of great importance as showing the hand of the Docetic heretic, who will not accept the doctrine of a suffering Christ. Jesus, in His supposed passion, is silent, *as not suffering*,

ὡς μηδὲν πόνον ἔχων.

Here Dr. Swete, [1] following a suggestion of Mr. J. O. F. Murray, rightly makes the parallel with Apoc. iii. 17. Rightly, for if the one case is popular Greek, so is the other; and we have, in fact, stumbled on the transitional μηδέν which is the conjugate to the οὐδέν of the texts of the Apocalypse.

The result is important in another direction. It was from this passage in *Ev. Petri* that Dr. Chase endeavoured to support his theory of Aramaic origin for the Gospel of Peter. His idea was that μηδέν was translators' Greek for a Syriac word *medem*, which means *anything*. Dr. Chase's words are as follows: [2]

"May not the phrase under consideration be a somewhat literal translation of the following Syriac words,

'As if any-thing (*medem*) of pain was-not to-him'?"

We have shown, however, that the text, as it stands in the MS., may be taken as good colloquial Greek, and does not

[1] Swete, *Gospel of Peter*, p. 6.
[2] *Syro-Latin Text of The Gospels*, p. 50.

require nor suggest Aramaic influence. So much for the Docetic passage in the Gospel of Peter.

No doubt further instances will be forthcoming of the peculiar usage to which we refer.

One other point comes out from the investigation on its historical side: it is this, that the parallel which we have adduced between the language of Tacitus and the message in the Apocalypse derives much of its force from the supposition that the Laodicean letter was written at a time not very remote from the earthquake itself. Forty years later than the earthquake, people would not have their minds full of the fact that the city had been restored at its own expense, nor, at this length of time, would a Christian writer have been likely to spiritualise the incident. The suggestion is that the Letters to the Seven Churches were written not very many years after A.D. 60.

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