

## TWO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS REGARDING TREGELLES' CANON MURATORIANUS

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The James White Library of Andrews University <sup>1</sup> contains two manuscript letters regarding Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-1875). The first of these is from Samuel Davidson (1807-1898), then of the University of London, to Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893), professor of Greek at Oxford, and is dated May 16, 1868. The second is from Jowett to Henry George Liddell (1811-1898), dean of Christ Church, and is undated. As far as I have been able to ascertain, neither letter has previously been published. <sup>2</sup> Reflecting an incident that apparently was soon forgotten and is never mentioned in the memoirs of any of the participants, <sup>3</sup> these letters are nevertheless of interest for their reflection of tensions created by critical theological studies in England a century ago. Thus they are worthy of at least a footnote in the history of New Testament scholarship.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due Mrs. Robert H. Mitchell, Librarian of Andrews University, for permission to publish these letters.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson's correspondence was never published, and Jowett's letter does not appear in his collected correspondence: E. Abbott and L. Campbell, *Letters of Benjamin Jowett, M.A.* (New York, 1899). Jowett directed on his death that all letters written him should be destroyed; apparently the letter from Davidson escaped because it had been forwarded to Liddell. The writer has not seen the recently published work, John M. Prest, *Robert Scott and Benjamin Jowett* (Oxford, 1966), which contains letters of these two men.

<sup>3</sup> No indication of the incident is found in either Abbott and Campbell, *op. cit.*, Geoffrey Faber, *Jowett, a Portrait with Background* (London, 1957), Davidson's *Autobiography and Diary* (Edinburgh, 1899), or H. L. Thompson, *Memoir of Henry George Liddell* (London, 1899). By the kindness of Mr. Dennis S. Porter of the Department of Western Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library (letter of August 12, 1966), I am informed that the Librarian of Balliol College has looked into the Jowett Papers but has found no reference to the incident, nor are there any indications in the manuscript collections at the Bodleian. No biography of Tregelles exists.

## I

Samuel Davidson, examiner in Scripture at London University, must have felt a certain satisfaction when he opened his copy of *The Athenaeum* for Saturday, May 16, 1868, and saw his unsigned review of Tregelles' edition of the *Canon Muratorianus* (Oxford, 1867). Davidson had written:

The Canon, or list of the New Testament books, originally published by Muratori is an interesting historical fragment of the second century. Unfortunately, however, its text is corrupt; so that conjecture has often to be applied in order to elicit a probable meaning. It is not an important document; nor does it cast much light on the difficulties connected with the formation of the New Testament canon. Many critics have investigated the document with minute skill; and we certainly thought that Bunson and Westcott had done enough to bring out its meaning, believing that nothing of value could be added to what they have written with the help of their predecessors, especially of Credner. A perusal of the present treatise has not dispelled this idea. A quarto volume was not needed to discuss the list over again. The author has done little if anything to justify another book about it. What Westcott has written in the second edition of his "History of the Canon of the New Testament" amply satisfies every reasonable requirement, superseding the necessity for a new volume. No addition of value is here made to the information which we had before. The only new thing it contains is a facsimile. We observe, also, that the author is unacquainted with some of the most recent critics who treat of the Muratorian Canon more or less fully; with Scholten, Van Heyst, Niermeyer, and Lomann, whose remarks might have modified some of his statements. But the treatise shows laborious and minute diligence in reading and interpreting the text.

The first three parts adhere pretty closely to the subject, though they exhibit here and there personal details interesting to nobody but the writer himself, and show an excess of the *ego*. In the fourth and fifth parts the dogmatic advocate appears, who makes strong statements, and even imputes motives to men as honest at least as himself. Thus we meet with the following: "It is, however, vain to overlook the fact that the fourth Gospel is distasteful on account of the doctrines which it sets forth with such plainness. The testimony of John the Baptist to our Lord is that to which the real objection is made." "Modern scepticism" is hated by our author with a perfect hatred. Not a few incorrect assertions are made in these fourth and fifth parts, which can only mislead the unlearned, such as, "It stands as an admitted fact that, in the last quarter of the second century, the reception and use of the four Gospels, *and of these alone*, was as unquestionable throughout the church as it is now at the

present time"; whereas Serapion, bishop at Antioch in the second century, finding the Gospel of Peter used by the Christians at Rhossus, in Cilicia, allowed it after he had himself examined the work. Equally inadmissible is the allegation, "Basileides expressly quotes St. John's Gospel." Is the critic ignorant of the fact that the verb "he says" in Hippolytus has no definite subject; that it is employed vaguely by that writer even where a plural goes before; and that in the 'Philosophumena' the opinions of the adherents of a sect are transferred to the founder? It is impossible to show that Basilides quotes John's Gospel.

The author argues that Justin Martyr used the fourth Gospel,—an assumption which has been disproved most effectually by Zeller, Hilgenfeld, and Scholten. He also argues for the authenticity of second Peter, which Calvin abandoned. But we cannot enter on such discussions. It is sufficient to remark that the field of higher criticism is not the place for Dr. Tregelles's powers. His partisan zeal gets the better of him; and the range of his knowledge soon contracts.

The delegates of the Clarendon Press should not allow one-sided criticism in their publications. Dogmatic prepossessions ought to be excluded. They are out of place in a publication professing to be scholarly and critical. Here they are dragged in unnecessarily, swelling the size of the volume in proportion as they detract from its worth.<sup>4</sup>

Behind Davidson's biting criticism lay a sorry story of deep personal injury growing out of a theological conflict with Tregelles a decade earlier. To understand this we must first consider the latter scholar. Born into a pious Quaker family (his uncle was the prominent engineer and Quaker leader, Edwin Octavius Tregelles), he entered the employment of a relative in the Neath Abbey Iron Works in Glamorganshire at an early age and never attended a university. Also he soon joined the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>5</sup> Thus both by a lack of formal

<sup>4</sup> *The Athenaeum*, London, Saturday, May 16, 1868 (No. 2116), p. 694.

<sup>5</sup> Tregelles' religious affiliation in the latter part of his life is variously described. *The Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 1959-60), XIX, 1097, says he became a Presbyterian; F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (4th ed., London, 1894), II, 241, in a short sketch of Tregelles' life, says his last years were spent "as a humble lay member of the Church of England, a fact he very earnestly begged me to keep in mind," and then adds in a footnote: "He gave the same assurance to A. Earle, D.D., Bishop of Marlborough, assigning as his reason the results of the study of the

education and by religious affiliation he was cut off from the main stream of theological scholarship and from many of the personal associations it would have provided. At the same time his natural inclinations and unquestioned genius for minute and critical study of manuscript texts soon led him to devote his life to Biblical research. His contact with the Codex Vaticanus at Rome in 1845 is well known, and his great critical edition of the Greek New Testament (1851-1872) was surpassed only by that of Tischendorf.

In 1854 the publishing firm of Longman requested Tregelles to undertake the revision of the New Testament section of Thomas Hartwell Horne's *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, first published in 1818 and now much in need of revision in view of a generation of critical scholarship. Tregelles' name had been proposed for the assignment by Davidson, at that time a professor in the Congregationalists' Lancashire Independent College at Manchester, and one of the leading representatives of German Biblical criticism in England. At the same time Davidson had agreed to undertake the Old Testament section on the understanding that he would be free to rewrite it fully.

When the new edition of the Old Testament section appeared in 1856, it was clear that Davidson was in accord with many critical views then dominant in Germany. In October of that year Tregelles wrote letters to the *Record* and to other religious papers expressing his concern lest the association of his name with Davidson's in the revision of the *Introduction*

Greek N.T." Commenting on this statement, T. C. F. Stunt, of Lincoln, England, who has investigated Tregelles' correspondence carefully, writes me (Letter of November 24, 1966): "I find it very hard to believe that Scrivener's account is absolutely true. It is impossible to square with his [Tregelles'] letters and writings." He goes on to explain that Tregelles accepted the Thirty-nine Articles, but not certain aspects of Anglican teaching such as infant baptism. The Compton Street congregation in Plymouth, with which Tregelles was associated, moved away from the Brethren and, while maintaining its independence, gradually adopted an organization similar to that of the Presbyterians.

be taken to mean that he shared the latter's opinions. He wrote:

In writing on the subject of the Holy Scripture, I trust that I have ever sought to uphold its plenary authority as inspired by the Holy Ghost; and thus it has been with sorrow as well as surprise, that I have observed that Dr. Davidson has used this work as the occasion for avowing and bringing into notice many sentiments and theories with regard to Scripture which his former works would not have intimated that he held, and his adoption of which was wholly unknown to Mr. Horne and myself. <sup>6</sup>

As a result of Tregelles' letter, a number of Congregationalist ministers were aroused against Davidson to the point that a committee was called to investigate the matter. After protracted and acrimonious discussion, Davidson was asked to defend himself in writing, which he did with a statement published in May, 1857, entitled *Facts, Statements, and Explanations*. In it he refers, to quote Picton, "with not unnatural warmth to the action of the former [Tregelles] and his communications to Church papers." <sup>7</sup>

The controversy was finally settled to the satisfaction of Davidson's critics in the summer of 1857 when he resigned from his chair. Writing of this many years later, he speaks of having been "turned out of house and home, with a name tainted and maligned," <sup>8</sup> and it is obvious from his *Autobiography* that he considered this the great crisis of his career. His negative attitude toward Tregelles continued throughout his life, as is evidenced by the following entry in his diary on January 17, 1889 (the only reference to Tregelles in his published diaries):

My esteemed friend Mr. Call, whose fine scholarship and extensive reading have often assisted me in coming to a decision on different

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by J. A. Picton, "The College Crisis," in Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 42. (Picton's narrative was written at Davidson's request and included in his autobiography.) Picton states that the publishers had regularly sent proof sheets of Davidson's revision to both Horne and Tregelles and that no protest was registered until after the publication of the book (*ibid.*, pp. 41, 43).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

questions, for his judgement is usually sound . . . has come across the lucubrations of Dr. Tregelles, whose English translation of Gesenius' *Lexicon* always tends to raise the anger of scholars because of remarks interposed to correct the great Hebraist's heresies. In all cases of Old Testament interpretation, in critical and grammatical questions, it need not be said that Gesenius is right and his corrector wrong.<sup>9</sup>

## II

Such were some of the incidents which lay in the background of Davidson's review of the *Canon Muratorianus*.<sup>10</sup> Clipping

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 215, 216. The translation of Gesenius was published by Bagster in 1846 and contains hundreds of instances in which Tregelles adds his own opinions in brackets, frequently to combat Gesenius' more liberal views; e.g., art. אֱל (p. XLV), where Gesenius suggests for Dan 11 : 36, אֱלֵי אֱלִים "whose tutelary deity God is," Tregelles remarks, "This is heathenish: rather, whose God, God really is"; under אֱלֹהִים (p. XLIX), he interpolates Gesenius as follows: "Perhaps retained from polytheism [an idea which is not to be entertained for a moment], in which אֱלֹהִים may be taken in a plural sense and understood of higher powers. [This is not the way in which the Scripture speaks of God]"; regarding עֲלִמָּה (p. DCXXXIV), he declares, "The object in view in seeking to undermine the opinion which would assign the signification of *virgin* to this word, is clearly to raise a discrepancy between Isa. 7 : 14, and Matt. 1 : 23: nothing which has been stated does, however, really give us any ground for assigning another meaning. . . . The absolute authority of the New Testament is . . . quite sufficient to settle the question to a Christian"; on שְׁמוּאֵל (p. DCCCXXXIII), where on linguistic grounds Gesenius suggests an alternative to the Biblical definition of "Samuel" (1 Sam 1 : 20), Tregelles breaks in to declare, "The Scripture definition of a name must always be the true one." Cf. Tregelles' obituary notice in *The Academy* (No. 157, N. 5), VII, 475.

<sup>10</sup> Scrivener, *op. cit.* II, 239, n. 1, reports: "Burgon, however, on comparing Tregelles' book with the document itself at Milan, cannot overmuch laud his minute correctness [*Guardian*, Feb. 5, 1873]. Isaac H. Hall made the same comparison at Milan and confirms Burgon's judgment. The custodian of the Ambrosian Library at Milan, the famous Ceriani, had nothing to do with the work or with the lithograph facsimile." The inaccuracies in question are probably to be explained in part, at least, by Tregelles' own account in a letter to his cousin, B. W. Newton (March 13, 1868, kindness of T. C. F. Stunt). He says that in the initial preparation of the lithographed facsimile, "every doubtful letter was sent to Milan for recomparison; and as this was done in 1859 when the war was going on between the French and Austrians it was rather a work of time." Before the book was completed, the facsimile was destroyed on the stone and had to be redone.

out the review, he addressed to Jowett the first of the two letters with which we are here concerned. He wrote:

4 Ormonde Terrace  
Regents Park  
London, N. W.  
May 16th 1868

My dear Sir,

Though I hope to see you when you come to preach for Mr. Haweis<sup>11</sup> I think it better to write in the mean time and call your attention to a recent work published by the Clarendon Press, the *Codex Muratorianus* edited by Tregelles. I have no fault to find with the first three parts of the work, but it strikes me that it is beyond the legitimate province of the Delegates to allow of such parts as the fourth and fifth to be published under their sanction. You will see my objection to them from the enclosed review in the *Athenaeum* of this day. Dean Liddell who has most to do with the Clarendon Press ought to look more closely at the character of the books issued.

Will you be good enough to inform me as to the exact time of the coming annual commemoration in Oxford. A lady in whom I am interested wishes to know in what week it is to take place.

My long meditated Introduction to the New Testament has been at length issued, but I anticipate for it little approval except from the few who have devoted themselves to N.T. studies. I could not help going to a certain extent with the Tübingen School, but like yourself, I was unable to adopt their opinion respecting several of St. Paul's epistles.

I am yours ever sincerely  
Samuel Davidson

Revd. Prof. Jowett

It was natural that under these circumstances Davidson should have written to Jowett. The latter had himself been under fire for his theological views, particularly since he had participated in the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860; for some years he had not been welcome to preach at St.

Then, "when . . . I received the book as completed I was vexed at finding that the new lithograph had been seriously altered *after* I had returned the last revise. I had to speak about the matter very decidedly and the lithographer found it needful to do his work over again. I received the proper facsimile yesterday. . . ."

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Reginald Haweis (1831-1901), perpetual curate of St. James's, Marylebone, a widely-heard lecturer on both sides of the Atlantic and writer on violins.

Mary's, the university church, though as reflected in this letter, London pulpits were open to him. In 1864 he had appeared before a committee of the House of Lords to testify regarding the question of abolishing religious tests from the universities, and in his testimony had criticized the ouster of Davidson from the Lancashire Independent College.<sup>12</sup>

On receipt of Davidson's letter, Jowett addressed the following lines (our second letter) to Liddell, since 1861 a delegate of the Clarendon Press, and one of its leading members:

My dear Dean

I will send you the enclosed thinking perhaps that you had better see it and will excuse the mention of your name in it. I am far from blaming the Clarendon Press though I suspect that the work is in this instance unworthy of them. I find that the Author is wanting to have a D.C.L.<sup>13</sup> to which he has no claim at all:

May I suggest to you one or two names for that honour: 1st Dr. Joseph Hooker<sup>14</sup> who is the President of the British Association for this year: (if he has not had one) He is a man of science of the real sort: I know him and would gladly entertain him.

2. W. B. Grove<sup>15</sup> is a man of real and great merit 3. Paget<sup>16</sup> the eminent Surgeon who is a most excellent man. 4. Monro<sup>17</sup> the Editor of Lucretius.

It will not be an honour to any of these men if Dr. Tregelles (who is a well meaning man enough) is associated with them:

I am glad to hear that you are coming to us on Sunday.

Ever yours  
B. Jowett

<sup>12</sup> Abbott and Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 32; "Benjamin Jowett," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed., 1910), XV, 528.

<sup>13</sup> Porter, *loc. cit.*, reports that the minutes of the Hebdomadal Council, which initiates recommendations for honorary degrees, give no indication that a proposal of a degree for Tregelles ever went that far.

<sup>14</sup> Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), botanist and traveller to the Antarctic, the Himalayas and elsewhere; director of the Kew Gardens, 1865-1885. He was an early friend of Darwin and his address as president of the British Association in 1868, at Norwich, was notable for his defense of Darwin's theories.

<sup>15</sup> Sir William Robert Grove (1811-1896), jurist and physicist, noted especially for his early researches on electric batteries, as well as for his work as a criminal lawyer.

<sup>16</sup> Sir James Paget (1814-1899), pioneer in pathology.

<sup>17</sup> David Binning Monro (1836-1905), distinguished as a Homeric scholar. From 1882, provost of Oriel; vice-chancellor of Oxford.

Presumably this was the end of the incident. Hooker had already been given a D.C.L. by Oxford in 1866, and Jowett's other nominees all sooner or later received the same honor (Monro waited until 1904); Tregelles never attained such recognition. The fact that the two letters and the clipping of Davidson's review in *The Athenaeum* have been preserved together (they are pasted inside our copy of Tregelles' *Canon Muratorianus*) suggests that all three were kept by Liddell as an interesting sidelight on this publication of the Clarendon Press.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> We must not conclude, however, that Tregelles was without friends at Oxford. By a number of the Evangelicals there he seems to have been well received, as is reflected in letters to his cousin, B. W. Newton. For excerpts from these I am indebted to T. C. F. Stunt. On August 13, 1863, Tregelles reported a conversation with John David Macbride (1778-1868), since 1813 principal of Magdalen Hall, Oxford, and a staunch Evangelical, who appears to have been his friend: "Dr. M[acbride] spoke a good deal about the state of Oxford . . . indeed as to Prof. [Arthur Penrhyn] Stanley he very much accords with you; he regards his influence to be in Oxford a moral and spiritual gangrene, eating out the vitality of all Christianity. . . ." Stanley was a friend and supporter of Jowett. On October 28, 1865, Tregelles wrote again, "I gave your message to the vice-chancellor [John Prideaux Lightfoot] who was very glad to receive it: he amusingly introduced me to people as his 'cousin' ": he and Mrs Lightfoot are both of them very kind." Tregelles had gone to Oxford at this time to collate a manuscript, and he says, "The Master of Balliol [Robert Scott] kindly arranged for me all that I wanted to do here." According to still another letter from Tregelles to Newton, of March 13, 1868 (see above, n. 10), Scott had urged the former to publish the *Canon Muratorianus*. Scott had been Jowett's rival ever since 1854 when to Jowett's disappointment he had been preferred over him for the mastership.