
SCRIVENER MISUNDERSTOOD

Scrivener and his work have been grossly misunderstood (or perhaps even intentionally misrepresented) by far too many KJV/TR advocates. Bro Pearson writes that he “supported the Textus Receptus and Codex Bezae.”¹ More firmly, Ouellette writes of Scrivener and his work on the revision committee and his text, “Men on their own committee such as Scrivener and Ellicott saw the superiority of the Greek Textus Receptus and questioned Hort’s true intentions. Scrivener, after the revision, edited his own Textus Receptus, choosing to have his name associated with what the churches recognized through the centuries rather than the apostasy associated with the new text.”² No part of those sentences is even remotely accurate. Pearson writes as though Scrivener thought the TR and Codex Bezae to be the same, and as though he supported exclusively one or the other (or somehow, paradoxically, both?). But Scrivener did no such thing, and further, the text of D is as divergent from the TR as almost any manuscript in existence. Ouellette writes so that it sounds like Scrivener had some major change of heart (to say nothing here of Ellicott³) about his work on the revision, thinking the revision a work of “apostasy.” He writes like Scrivener believed Hort and

¹ Pearson, “Inspiration and Canonicity” pg. 81. How exactly he thinks Scrivener supported both the TR *and* Codex D (a Western text) is beyond this author. The same author had already explained that this same manuscript “is Western in the text family. It is ten percent longer in the book of Acts. Metzger says, ‘No manuscript has so many and such remarkable variations from what is usually taken to e [sic] the normal New Testament Text.’ Burgon says it is the worst example of a Bible text” (Pearson, “Inspiration” pg. 64.). Does the author equate this text with the TR?

² Ouellette, “A More Sure Word” pg. 108. He also notes further, “After serving on the Revision Committee with Westcott and Hort, he distanced himself from that project by editing his own edition of the Received Text in 1881.” (pg. 96; 193.) Scrivener did disagree at points with WH, but the 1881 edition of the TR was no attempt to “distance himself from that project” – it was produced as an integral part of that project, and indicated no such “distancing” by Scrivener.

³ While it won’t be developed here, it should be noted that the mention of Bishop Ellicott in this estimation is likewise utterly inaccurate distortion of the facts. Ellicott rendered his own high estimation of the Greek text of the RV of 1881 at length in a series of address, where he noted, to take but a few examples, “And, as I venture to think, the text which has been constructed from their decisions [the Revised Version committee’s textual decisions], their resultant text as it might be called, will show that the Revisers’ text is an independent text on which great reliance can be placed. It is the text which I always use myself in my general reading of the New Testament, and I deliberately regard it as one of the two best texts of the New Testament at present extant [the other being the first edition of the Nestle text].” (Ellicott, “Addresses” pg. 72, Kindle edition). He also referred to it as having, “great claims on our unreserved acceptance” and that it should, “for the very truth’s sake, be read in our churches,” and that it, “is in my judgment, the best balanced text that has appeared in this country...” etc. (“Addresses” pg. 84). This is all the more notable for the fact that Ouellette lists this very work in his bibliography. One would presume him to have read it. If he did, he is knowingly misrepresenting Ellicott. If he did not, and he is reproducing a “hand-me-down” quotation from a secondary source, then is it really an act of integrity to list it in his bibliography and quote from it as though he had any idea what it said?

Westcott to be evil men with dishonest intentions.⁴ He writes like Scrivener was a defender of the TR he edited. He writes like Scrivener thought his edition of the TR was identical to the originals. He writes like Scrivener set forth his Greek text as a desire to return to the text that had always been used. He writes like the Greek text that was behind the RV was identical to the text of WH. But not one of these things is true. They are all gross distortions of the truth.

Why did he produce the 1881 edition of the TR, and what did he think of it? Note several statements from Scrivener's preface to the work, the original preface to the TR, by the man who actually compiled it in 1881. Surely no one's voice is more authoritative to answer such questions. "The special design of this volume is to place clearly before the reader the variations from the Greek text represented by the Authorized Version of the New Testament which had been embodied in the Revised Version."⁵ Scrivener was on the revision committee. He goes on to explain that while originally, the RV committee planned to put all the differences between the Greek text of the KJV and their own in the margins, it was decided that this would exceed the size of the margin, and so they decided to comply with that requirement by simply printing a list of places they had diverged. However, such divergence could only be noted if one had a printed text from which to show the divergence, thus his present volume. He continues,

"The Cambridge Press has therefore judged it best to set the readings actually adopted by the Revisers at the foot of the page, and to keep the continuous text consistent throughout by making it so far as was possible uniformly representative of the Authorized Version. The publication of an edition formed on this plan appeared to be all the more desirable, inasmuch as the Authorized Version was not a translation of any one Greek text then in existence, and no Greek text intended to reproduce in any way the original of the Authorized Version has ever been printed. In considering what text had the best right to be regarded as 'the text presumed to underlie the authorized Version,' it was necessary to take into account the composite nature of the Authorized Version, as due to successive revisions of Tyndale's translation."⁶

And,

⁴ Contra Ouellette, on Ellicott's estimation of the integrity of Hort's intentions, see Ellicott himself, "Addresses" pg. 66-71. Amazingly, Ouellette, in a context of attacking the integrity of WH, repeatedly quotes Ellicott, as though Ellicott were attacking WH and their integrity (Ouellette, "A More Sure Word," pg. 93), which is what he asserts directly in the quote above - but Ellicott's context is that of *defending* Hort's integrity! Ellicott often felt the WH text in error (specifically, in the 200 + places where the revisers chose readings different from the WH text), and disagreed with some elements of their theory, but would never have questioned the integrity or scholarship of the doctors, noting of them, (for but one example), "To Doctors Westcott and Hort all faithful students of the New Testament owe a debt of lasting gratitude which it is impossible to overestimate." (Ellicott, "Addresses," pg. 73). Ouellette lists Ellicott's work in his bibliography, but one easily gains the suspicion that he never read it, and knows the citations only from some KJV-only source that has dishonestly misused them, an all-too-common phenomenon in such literature.

⁵ Scrivener, "The New Testament in Greek," pg. v.

⁶ Scrivener, pg. vii

“It was manifestly necessary to accept only Greek authority, though in some places the Authorized Version corresponds but loosely with any form of the Greek original, while it follows exactly the Latin Vulgate.”⁷

Scrivener absolutely didn't believe he was magically reconstructing the Divine original text under supernatural guidance in this work, nor did he ever think this text an inerrant replica of the originals. He didn't think it was a better Greek text at all. He thought this text repeatedly in error. He thought much of modern textual criticism to be a great advancement from the KJV and its work. He did not produce his text to say, “This is what I think the NT text should read.” Nothing of the sort. He produced it, as he explained above,⁸ to say, “This is what the KJV translators decided was the best (but fallible) reconstruction of the original NT they could come up with.” His own views on the text of the NT are clearly set out in his two-volume introduction to textual criticism,⁹ and he makes plain in that work a number of critical judgments that make it clear he believed the KJV translators and their text to have been at a great many points.

Scrivener stood midway between Burgon and Hort in terms of his text-critical method and views (and probably, of the two, closer to Burgon, though note in the appendix below how far even Burgon was from defending the TR). For example, while Burgon hated Vaticanus and rejected it entirely, and Hort adored it and gave it far too much weight, Scrivener writes in a more balanced way. “Without anticipating what must be discussed hereafter we may say at once, that, while we accord to Cod. B at least as much weight as to any single document in existence, we ought never to forget that it is but one out of many, several of them being nearly (and one [Sinaiticus] quite) as old, and in other respects not less worthy of confidence than itself.”¹⁰ Of Sinaiticus likewise, while he

⁷ Scrivener, pg. ix.

⁸ See also Ellicott's Explanation that this task was given to Scrivener, while Palmer was given the opposite text of constructing the Greek text of the RV, being the combination of the text critical decisions of the translation committee, which was also published as a companion volume to the RV (Ellicott, “Addresses” pg. 75, E-Pub edition). A modern parallel is seen in the publication of the combination of the textual decisions of the different NIV translation committees, which differed from the standard text in some 231 places, and was thus printed as a separate Greek text, “A Readers Greek New Testament.”

⁹ There were four editions of his intro published. It was initially one volume, but it continued to expand as Scrivener continued to do text-critical work, and to get (in his mind) closer and closer to the original text of the NT. His first edition was 506 pages, his second, 626. His third, 751. He began work on a fourth, and made notations it would include, but died just before completing it. His good friend Miller published it just after his death, with its 874 pages, just as he did much of Burgon's unfinished work.

¹⁰ Scrivener, “*Plain Introduction*,” 4th ed., pg. 184. Note also his statement concerning Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, A, and C, that, “You are already aware that these documents are of the very highest value and importance when we come to examining the text of Holy Scripture,” and describes them as holding, “the first rank” among NT manuscripts. (Scrivener, “Six Lectures,” pg. 25). He warned students not to consider B infallible, and listed some of its undeniable errors “of the most palpable character,” to make that caution clear to his students, but qualified that this was, “from no wish to

definitely thought it had been given too much weight by Tischendorf (and this writer quite agrees), he considered it one of our most valuable text-critical resources. Amazingly, Ouellette writes of Scrivener's view of Sinaiticus and the Greek text of the Revision Committee that he

“...made the following observations about the manuscripts on which it relied: ‘[The Codex Sinaiticus] is covered with such alterations, brought in by *at least* ten different revisers, some of them systematically spread over every page... [emphasis his].’ He noticed ten different handwriting styles in one manuscript. Why was there a need for ten different people to continue correcting this manuscript? Because those who first handled it felt it was not a good manuscript!”¹¹

But this is to utterly rip Scrivener's quotation out of its context and turn its intent on its head. Scrivener is pointing out that almost all manuscripts contain notations and alterations from later editors. The fact that 10 different hands appear in Sinaiticus was, to Scrivener's mind, one more proof of its ancient age and exceptional value, which is the point he is making in the context. Much like a well-used Bible passed down for generations accumulates many notes, annotations, comments, etc. (e.g., a Bible-loving Preacher uses it for a life and gives to his son, who uses for a lifetime and gives to son, etc.), a manuscript which is of ancient origin and constant use by the church accumulates notations from a variety of editors in many different hands. The more hands, the more ancient the document; the more spread out in time they are, the more the document was in use.¹² Thus, editors of what Scrivener considers, “the most venerable” manuscripts have extra work to do in sorting through these notations. Scrivener's full quotation is as follows,

“Nearly all Biblical manuscripts abound in changes brought by more recent editors into the text, varying widely in age and value, all which an editor is bound to record and discriminate with utmost care. Speaking generally, the most venerable documents, as having passed through many hands during a long course of ages, may be expected to cost the greatest labour in this particular: Codd. Bezae and Clarmontanus, for example (in the latter Tischendorf detects nine different emendators), are full of corrections, which again will often be withdrawn by later scribes; so that much patience and fixed attention are needed to discover the original reading, and trace the successive changes the text has undergone. It is no slight proof of the of the early date of Codex Sinaiticus, that it is covered with such alterations, brought in by at least ten different revisers, others occasioned or limited to separate portions of the manuscript, many of them being contemporaneous with the first writer, far the greater part belonging to the sixth or seventh century, a few being as recent as the twelfth.”¹³

disparage the Codex Vaticanus from its rightful place at the head of all our textual authorities...” (*Six Lectures*, pg. 42-43).

¹¹ Ouellette, “*A More Sure Word*,” pg. 95-96. Brackets and ellipses are Ouellette's.

¹² There is much more to dating a document than this – this consideration is only one small part of Scrivener's long argument that Sinaiticus is of ancient origin.

¹³ Scrivener, “*A Full Collation*,” pg. xvii-xix. See also his extended refutation in the same volume (all of Chapter IV, pg. lx-lxxii) of what he regarded as the ridiculous claim that Sinaiticus was a forgery (a

Ouellette has taken a partial quote from Scrivener, in which Scrivener was exalting the manuscript on account of its age, and he has used it to claim that Scrivener held exactly the opposite view that he actually stated. This is nothing short of dishonest. Scrivener absolutely didn't support the TR, and didn't hate Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Scrivener made it quite plain that he was confident that I John 5:7 of the KJV was not original, as were all textual scholars of his time,¹⁴ that Acts 8:37 in the KJV was originally a marginal note that had crept into the text on accident,¹⁵ that Acts 15:34 of the KJV was no doubt unoriginal.¹⁶ Unlike Hort, he was convinced the last 12 verses of Mark were original, but unlike Burgon he was not as sure about the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11.¹⁷ In the section of his Introduction to textual criticism where he goes over examples of scribal errors (pg. 36-53) several dozen of the examples he uses make it plain that he often felt the KJV and TR in error. And he is not intending to spell out his disagreements with the TR there, simply giving representative examples of the types of scribal errors the student will find in the manuscript record. Further, his own opinion of the KJV, the TR text which he edited to reproduce its text, and notes about several of its errors are clearly set forth in his volume, "*The Authorized Edition of the English Bible.*" But were those examples not enough, he devoted one entire volume to spelling out what he considers multiple errors in the KJV and its Greek text. He produced a volume titled, "*A Supplement to the Authorized Version New Testament*" in which he spent some 50 pages classifying a

nonsense claim oddly repeated as the basis of the "A Lamp in the Dark" videos), where he marshals these corrections as one of his arguments. He concludes, "Such are the grounds of our firm conviction that Codex Sinaiticus is a monument of the Biblical scholarship and pious skill of the fourth century of our era. On its happy discovery we congratulate the Christian world, and respectfully thank Professor Tischendorf for the care and diligence he has bestowed upon editing it." (pg. lxxii.) He certainly felt Tischendorf (and to a lesser degree, WH) relied too heavily on Sinaiticus, which he felt was very inferior to Vaticanus (e.g., *Six Lectures*, pg. 49). Almost all textual critics today agree with that assessment, and this reader perhaps more than most. But to twist his words of veneration for the manuscript into a statement of attack against it is simply a lack of academic integrity, and is dishonoring to his legacy of careful and balanced scholarship.

¹⁴ Scrivener, Plain Introduction, 1st ed. pg. 293 and at length 457-463; note that his assessment of scholars includes Burgon as well, who clearly rejected the idea that I John 5:7 could be original.

¹⁵ Plain Introduction, 4th ed. pg. 464-467; 1st ed. pg. 8.

¹⁶ "No doubt this verse is an unauthorized addition, self-condemned indeed by its numerous variations (*see* p. 361). One can almost trace its growth, and in the shape presented by the Received text it must have been (as Mill conjectures) a marginal gloss, designed to explain how (notwithstanding the terms of ver. 33) Silas was at hand in ver. 40, conveniently for St. Paul to choose him as a companion in travel." (Plain Intro 1st ed. pg. 444; 4th ed. pg. 470-471).

¹⁷ After his lengthy examination of the strong evidence against it being original, where he explains that the only thing that would make it possible as original is if John originally published his gospel without it, then added it in a second edition, he finally writes with uncertainty, "we cannot help admitting that if this section be indeed the composition of St. John, it has been transmitted to us under circumstances widely different from those connected with any other genuine passage of Scripture whatever." (Plain Intro 4th ed. vol. II pg. 464)

list of multiple errors of the KJV/TR NT under three headings; Errors of Criticism (errors in the Greek text of the TR),¹⁸ Errors of Interpretation (places the translators erred in their translation), and Errors of Expression, (places where obsolete or obscure English words or expressions now caused the KJV to be in error).¹⁹

Anyone who has actually read any of Scrivener's writings knows that the statements above by Ouellette and Pearson (as well as numerous similar statements by others using Scrivener to defend the KJV and TR) are terribly ill informed. In his own textual method, and the revisions he felt were necessary to the KJV/TR, he was far less conservative than Burgon, though he often was more conservative than Westcott/Hort. He was a good friend of both. He never spoke maliciously of Hort's motives. He never expressed any compunction at his work on the revision, though he did disagree with some of its ultimate textual choices at several points, as is clear from his introduction to textual criticism, and from Ellicott's recounting of the textual discussions. He certainly respected the KJV as generally reliable as a translation,²⁰ and believed it should be highly regarded (as did almost all critics of the time), but he was far from regarding it as without error, and far from defending his TR as identical to the originals – on the contrary he repeatedly urged others to consider and correct the errors of that text.

The 1894 edition of his text was later reprinted by TBS, but they chose to reprint only the actual Greek text. They completely omitted the hundreds of textual annotations that were the express purpose of the original volume. Further, they oddly chose to completely omit, and not reprint, the introductory preface we have quoted from above, wherein Scrivener describes the purpose and method of his work, and the composite nature of its creation. One might easily suspect that they were catering to an audience who wanted to suppress the true origin of the text, as though we could best honor God's word by secrecy about the errors of one particular edition of it. The little blue TR which is sold in some KJVO bookstores, and which is being promoted as the verbally perfect copy of the TR is in fact this reprint, which they would have us believe (as a matter of doctrine no less!) is verbally identical to the original autographs of the NT. But to identify this combination of the translator's textual decisions, created for the first time in 1611, and later fallibly reconstructed by Scrivener, as the perfectly "preserved Word of God" containing "the very words He inspired" is in fact to say that no one had ever had the verbally preserved Word of God anywhere in Greek until Scrivener published his work in 1881. If one demands that Scrivener's text is the verbally perfect Greek text, then he is directly admitting to believing that the KJV translators were infallibly guided by God in their textual choices, because Scrivener's text is simply his reconstruction of those choices. It is also to inescapably condemn every Greek Text and manuscript in existence today of any substantial length as being "corrupt" since not one of them agrees with the full TR produced by Scrivener (or with the KJV which birthed it, and which it represents). Such an assertion simply will not work logically, unless one asserts the inspiration of the KJV translators, (and perhaps also of Scrivener). It is suspected that if most KJVO students, teachers, and graduates, would do even a little honest

¹⁸ Note that these are places he is directly saying that the Greek text he edited in 1881 does NOT reflect the original.

¹⁹ See Scrivener, "A Supplement," pg. 6-56.

²⁰ E.g., see his high words of praise in "*Supplement*" pg. vii, though he concludes even that thought by noting, "Yet however excellent our common translation as a whole, like every other work of man, it is far from being faultless."

historical work to understand the history of the KJV, and the Greek text that it birthed, they would likewise realize their own position to be seriously untenable.

The position that the KJV and the TR are the perfectly verbally preserved Word of God is possible at the logical level only if one believes that the translators were re-inspired by God to perfectly re-create a Greek text that had never existed anywhere before their time, and that Scrivener was later inspired when he reconstructed and printed their choices. Just think through the process involved, and ask, which of them was perfectly verbally preserved? Erasmus? He corrected and improved himself in several different editions. He was then corrected by Stephanus. Stephanus? He corrected and improved himself in several different editions. He was then corrected by Beza. Beza? He corrected and improved himself in almost a dozen different editions. The KJV translators differed even from him in around 200 places, though they followed him much more closely than any other. Which did the KJV translators use? Not any one of them. They picked and choose readings variously from each. So were they "God's instruments of preservation?" This is simply a misuse of the word "preserve." It is impossible to say "yes" in any way that would be unique to the KJV as opposed to other translations unless one believes the KJV translators were inspired by God in their textual decisions.

Besides that; where is the perfect Greek text that they produced by their choices? If one claims it is verbally preserved and has been constantly accessible to the church (as a matter of doctrine no less!) then it should be easily accessible today. So where is it? They never printed it. They would never have thought the composite result of their own haphazard textual choices valuable enough to print as a separate Greek text to compare to the works of great textual scholars like Beza and Erasmus. What about Scrivener? He sought to work backwards with the sources in hand to figure out which source they had followed when, and to thus reconstruct their Greek text, which he then printed. So was he God's instrument used to preserve His words in Greek? Was his text the perfect Greek text that contains "the very words that God inspired?" This is what some doctrinal statements demand that we believe. But if so, what it actually means is that Scrivener was supernaturally moved by God to produce a Greek text that is different in places from each of the Greek texts the translators had, and different in manifold places from every single Greek manuscript that has ever been found, and thus to demand that the perfect Greek text which contains "the very words God inspired" didn't exist *anywhere* until 1881. One may call such a belief by many names, but it simply cannot be logically and honestly called "*preservation*;" it would in fact be divinely inspired *restoration*. Believe and teach what they will, integrity seems to demand that every student being required to agree to such a statement should be made aware of what they are actually assenting to. Despite all their attempts to deny it, they are asserting the divine inspiration of the KJV translators. In fact, students should probably be required to read the "preface" of Scrivener's TR, (or to look at the text-critical notes of Erasmus, Beza, and Stephanus), as well as the KJV's "The Translators to the Reader" so that they are made aware when they agree to the statement of faith that they are in fact agreeing to a statement that Scrivener, and every single individual involved in producing the TR, would never have agreed to, and would frankly have been horrified to hear. Not one of the men who produced the TR which is being (doctrinally!) asserted as verbally perfect would agree to such claims.

BURGON MISREPRESENTED

John W. Burgon is perhaps the scholar most often appealed to in support of the KJVO or TRO position. For example, Bro. Pearson mentions Burgon's Anglican theology but then states, "But these defects in Burgon's view do not affect the validity of his views about the New Testament text."²¹ We couldn't agree more.²² Burgon was an incredible scholar. Ouellette lists Burgon under "those who have held to the superiority of the Textus Receptus," and often implies this connection.²³ He later writes, under the heading, "Considering the Reliability of the Text" that,

"Here it become clear as to which text is more reliable. One man, Warfield, holds a Critical text in hand, determined to not let any more corruption in. Another man, Burgon, holds in his hand a text that is genuine Scripture without a trace of doubt. Peter thanked God for a 'more sure word...' which text best fits that description? The obvious answer to this question would be the Received Text."²⁴

²¹ Person, "Inspiration and Canonicity," pg. 85.

²² And one might add, neither should Hort and Westcott's Anglican Theology affect the value of their work. They were both Anglican bishops. Neither should the Anglican theology of the KJV translators affect the value of their work, they also were all Anglicans, and all but a handful of them were Anglican priests. But the standard must be consistently applied to each. No one can object to WH on the basis of their Anglican bibliology (or Anglican Ecclesiology, etc.) and then pretend that the Anglican bibliology, ecclesiology, etc. of the KJV translators is irrelevant to its value.

²³ Ouellette, "A More Sure Word" pg. 108.

²⁴ Ouellette, "A More Sure Word" pg. 113. Amazingly, he quotes Burgon's statement "without a particle of doubt" as though Burgon was referring to the whole text of the TR. Burgon was rather referring in this context to a particular textual problem, not a full text. (Ouellette combines quotations from two different pages found in a single appendix in Burgon, *The Traditional Text*, pg. 233-266). This passage, the *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53-8:11), was one of only a handful of passages that Burgon defended with this level of vigor, and even at that his phrase "without a particle of doubt" which is so amenable to Ouellette's presuppositions about the text, is something of a hyperbole for Burgon. For example, in the same context Burgon notes that this passage is, "the most difficult problem of all." More pertinent to Ouellette's misrepresentation of Burgon, the form of the text which Burgon defends differs from the TR/KJV repeatedly! Even in the text as presented in the very appendix from which Ouellette quotes, in the first two verses alone which Burgon defends (John 7:53-8:1), the following corrections to the TR/KJV are presented (to/unto, + but, to/unto, +again, + very, presented himself /came again into – see his text on pg. 235). For the full text of this passage which Burgon actually defended, with numerous differences from the KJV/TR, see his "A Plain Commentary on The Four Holy Gospels" Vol. II, pg. 722-726, (though note that this is a devotional commentary, not a textual one, so he raises few textual issues), where he writes (for example) of the TR/KJV phrase, *μη προσποιούμενος*, "Take notice of the words in italics...that they form no part of the sacred record. They are not the words of inspiration; but the pious suggestion of some very ancient reader, who inscribed them in the margin of his copy of St. John's Gospel..." Or note his preference of the form, "be the first to cast his stone at her" verses the KJV, "let him first cast a stone at her," which he denounces as a mistake. Or his preference to translate the Traditional Text of verse 10 as "Hath no one remained to demand the enforcement of law against thee?" verses the KJV "Hath no man Condemned thee?" If one wants to say Burgon held in his hand a text, "without a trace of doubt" then they must explain that he was actually convinced, *without a trace of doubt*, that the

Burton is repeatedly appealed to as though he would defend the KJV or the TR.²⁵ These appeals stem from two basic factors – the authors know he didn't like the Hort and Westcott text, and they ignorantly assume that all textual options are "either WH or TR." Thus they conclude that Burton must have defended the TR or the KJV. But they arrive at this conclusion out of a total ignorance of Burton's own method and writings, which he sets out plainly. These appeals to Burton represent rather a historical revisionism of the worst kind. Note some of Burton's own statements to the contrary which refute them. Burton writes,

*"Once for all, we request it may be clearly understood that we do not, by any means, claim perfection for the Received Text. We entertain no extravagant notions on this subject. Again and again we shall have occasion to point out (e.g. at page 107) that the Textus Receptus needs correction. We do but insist, (1) That is as incomparably better text than that which either Lachmann, or Tischendorf, or Tregelles has produced: infinitely preferable to the 'New Greek Text' of the Revisionists. And, (2) That to be improved, the Textus Receptus will have to be revised on entirely different 'principles' from those which are just now in fashion."*²⁶

And,

*"For, in not a few particulars, the 'Textus Receptus' does call for Revision, certainly; although Revision on entirely different principles from those which are found to have prevailed in the Jerusalem Chamber."*²⁷

While many TR advocates will deny the existence of copyist error of any kind (which immediately reveals an utter lack of acquaintance with the manuscript record itself in anyone who makes such a statement), Burton himself didn't think anyone would sensibly hold such sentiments. After affirming his view of preservation in the majority of surviving witnesses to a textual variant, he writes,

*"That a perpetual miracle was wrought for their preservation – that copyists were protected against the risk of error, or evil men prevented from adulterating shamefully copies of the Deposit – no one, it is presumed, is so weak as to suppose."*²⁸

KJV/TR was in error in multiple places here, and that the Traditional Text (i.e., today called the Majority Text) should be preferred over it.

²⁵ See Ouellette's multiple statements referring to Burton as though Burton would agree with the TR (pg. 96, 97, 98, 100, 106, 108, 110, 112, 113, 114, 140, etc.).

²⁶ Burton, *"Revision Revised"*, Pg. 21, fn 2. Note his presentation of several examples of errors in the TR in *"The Traditional Text"* vol. II, pg. 60-61, 63,

²⁷ Burton, *"Revision Revised"*, pg. 107. See also his statements in *"The Traditional Text"* Vol. II, pg. 10-11, where he notes his desire to see the errors of the TR corrected, and his constant conviction that the revisers of 1881 have done a rather poor job of revising the TR.

²⁸ Burton, *"The Traditional Text"*, vol. 1. Pg. 11. As to his second point, he is being somewhat facetious, as his good friend Scrivener strongly disagreed, as did Erasmus, most textual critics in Burton's own day, prior to his day, and after his day. He and his editor Miller are among only a small handful of textual critics who have ever held the notion that "evil men" sought to alter Scripture.

Burgon again wrote,

*"I am not defending the 'Textus Receptus'; I am simply stating the fact of its existence. That it is without authority to bind, nay, that it calls for skillful revision in every part, is freely admitted. I do not believe it to be absolutely identical with the true Traditional Text. Its existence, nevertheless, is a fact from which there is no escaping."*²⁹

He goes on to explain that the textual criticism method he is proposing is in fact designed to provide a proper means by which to correct the TR. "Therefore the business before us might be stated somewhat as follows: What considerations ought to determine our acceptance of any reading not found in the Received Text, or, to state it more generally and fundamentally, our preference of one reading before another?"³⁰

Burgon understood that every Greek manuscript was in at least some small particulars different from every other manuscript, which is why he believed, as do all textual critics, that textual criticism is essential in order to reconstruct the original text of the NT, and why this reconstruction is always tentative.³¹ He explained his attitude towards every manuscript when he noted, "When I take into my hands an ancient copy of the Gospels, I expect that it will exhibit sundry inaccuracies and imperfections: and I am never disappointed in my expectation."³² He also wrote elsewhere, "But I would especially remind my readers of Bentley's golden precept, that, 'The real text of the sacred writers does not now, since the originals have been so long lost, lie in any mss or edition, but is dispersed in them all.' This truth, which was evident to the powerful intellect of that great scholar, lies at the root of all sound textual criticism."³³

He concludes this thought with the statement that no manuscript and no Greek text is perfect, noting, "I will venture to make only one more postulate, viz. this; That hitherto we have become acquainted with no single authority which is entitled to dictate absolutely on all occasions, or even on any one occasion, as to what shall be regarded as the true Text of Scripture. We have here no infallible witness, I say, whose solitary dictum is competent to settle controversies."³⁴

Edward Miller, who sorted through Burgon's unpublished works to complete and publish Burgon's, *"The Traditional Text,"* explained the position of his good friend Burgon. He wrote,

"The way in which my investigation has been accomplished is as follows: - A standard of reference being absolutely necessary, I have kept before me a copy of Scrivener's Cambridge Greek Testament, A.D. 1887, in which the disputed passages are printed in black type, although the text there

²⁹ Burgon, *"The Traditional Text"* vol. 1. Pg. 15.

³⁰ Burgon, *"The Traditional Text"* vol. 1. Pg. 16.

³¹ See his explanation of reconstruction of the original as the object of textual criticism in *"The Traditional Text"* vol. 1, esp. pages 19, and 27.

³² Burgon, *"The Traditional Text"* Vol. II, pg. 18.

³³ Burgon, *"The Traditional Text"* vol. 1 pg. 26.

³⁴ Burgon, *"The Traditional Text"* vol. 1 pg. 28.

presented is the Textus Receptus from which the Traditional Text as revised by Dean Burgon and hereafter to be published differs in many passages.”³⁵

Burgon was in the process of editing his own Greek text of the NT, which would correct what he saw as the many errors of the TR, but without what he perceived to be the errors of the WH methodology. Miller also explained,

“First, be it understood, that we do not advocate perfection in the Textus Receptus. We allow that here and there it requires revision. In the Text left behind by Dean Burgon [his unfinished revision of the Greek NT], about 150 corrections have been suggested by him in St. Matthew’s Gospel alone [and he had only finished the first 14 chapters]. What we maintain is the TRADITIONAL TEXT.”³⁶

Burgon made it quite clear what he would think of anyone who misunderstood him to have thought the TR perfect, and what he would have thought of anyone who actually held such a position, (though it is evident that he believes no sane person in his time did hold such a position). He wrote,

“But pray, who in his senses, - what sane man in Great Britain, - ever dreamed of regarding the ‘received,’ - aye, or any other known text, - as a standard from which there shall be no appeal? Have I ever done so? Have I ever implied as much? If I have, show me where. You refer your readers to the following passage, [which he then quotes at length]. I mistake the ‘Textus Receptus’ therefore, (you imply) for the divine original, the Sacred Autographs, - and erect it into a standard ‘from which there shall be no appeal.’ - ‘A tradition which it is little else but sacrilege to impugn’ - that is how you state my case and condition: hopelessly confusing the standard of comparison with the standard of excellence. By this time, however, enough has been said to convince any fair person that you are without warrant in your present contention [their contention, which he is correcting, being that Burgeon felt the TR to be a perfect standard of excellence that should not be corrected, identical to the Divine original]. Let any candid scholar cast an impartial eye over the preceding three hundred and fifty pages, - open the volume where he will, and read steadily on to the end of any textual discussion, - and then say whether, on the contrary, my criticism does not invariably rest on the principle that the Truth of Scripture is to be sought in that form of the Sacred Text which has the fullest, the widest, and the most varied attestation. Do I not invariably make the consentient voice of Antiquity my standard? If I do not, - if, on the contrary, I have ever once appealed to the ‘Received Text’ and made it my standard, - why do you not prove the truth of your allegation by adducing in evidence that one particular instance?”³⁷

More quotes could be produced from his works, including specific instances where he proclaims the TR and the KJV in error. Literally every textual discussion in Burgon’s writings shows that he didn’t believe (and certainly didn’t presume) the TR to be perfect, and how he often felt the TR needed to be continually revised in light of text-critical principles. He was in fact, as he explained above, working on his own NT Greek text, as an alternate which would stand midway between the TR and the WH, which was sadly never finished and published. When he was accused of teaching that the TR was a perfect text that shouldn’t be corrected, he replied that anyone who could think that of him simply hasn’t read what he actually wrote. Many a modern author would fall under his accusing words. He was determined that the “Voice of antiquity” be his standard principle of textual criticism.

³⁵ Miller, Edward, in “The Traditional Text” vol. 1. Pg. 95-96.

³⁶ Miller, Edward, in “The Traditional Text” vol. 1, pg. 5.

³⁷ Burgon, Revision Revised, pg. 383-389.

It is certainly true that he disagreed sharply with the WH theory and text, but note that in his day there were around 2000 miniscule manuscripts discovered, but only 2 (very late) papyri, and only 5 majuscules. He rightly thought it very wrongheaded to correct the majority of miniscules with only a handful of early witnesses (in that day, with only the evidence they had available, I would have largely agreed). But today, that handful of early witness has been multiplied by a factor of *several hundred*, while the Byzantine representatives have multiplied by a factor of around 2 or 3.

Further, it needs to be noted that Burgon's basic problem with the WH theory (which is not at all essential to the text of the NA28, or UBS5 by the way) was that the basic "Alexandrian" text of WH was the result of eventual corruption first introduced by Origin. Since this theory was ignoring the majority of manuscripts on the basis of only a handful or witnesses, which he thought corrupted by Origin, his rebuttal held some weight in its day, given the evidence he had. Origin wrote most of his work in the first half of the 3rd century. At the time Burgon wrote, there was no Greek manuscript that preceded that time, and so he relied heavily on the patristic³⁸ and Versional data to make his case, which at that time seemed brilliant to some, while most thought it wrongheaded. Yet today, a search of the INTF VMR by date shows that there are 61 papyri manuscripts that predate the middle of the 3rd century, which could *not* have been the result of corruption from Origin.³⁹ Not one of them agrees with the TR against the NA 28 in all of their readings, and most of them contain "Alexandrian" readings (though perhaps not an "Alexandrian text"), which shows Burgon's basic theory to be in error. Burgon's entire theory would have to be re-thought were he here today. I suspect he would still oppose many of the modern principles of reasoned eclecticism, but probably much less sharply. Either way, the principles he follows,⁴⁰ as set forth in his, "*The Traditional Text*" are almost identical

³⁸ It should be noted that he produced a massive 16-volume index to the patristic authors, which is almost universally considered worthless today. He was a brilliant patristic scholar, but he employed only uncritical editions of the fathers in his works. It is now widely recognized that the text found in a manuscript of a father typically corresponds to whatever form of the text was current in the day the scribe produced the copy of the father, not the form of the text the father actually employed. In numerous occasions, these later copies of a father include the fathers comments upon the text, which don't match the form of the text included for them to be commenting on! Today, we have several hundred times more patristic data than Burgon had, and the laborious task of sifting through it to do textual criticism of a father's works, looking through all the manuscripts of a particular writing, evaluating the date and character of the manuscripts, etc. is producing much more reliable editions of the fathers. This continuing work has affected the UBS 4-5 apparatuses in great ways for example, and that apparatus, and the modern index, is now far more reliable than Burgon's work.

³⁹ Images or transcripts of almost all of these papyri are available from the INTF. The printed text of each of them is available in the volume by Comfort. I would be happy to go through them one at a time with anyone who is interested and show them that there is not a single one of these papyri which agrees in all of its readings with the TR against the NA 28, and that in fact where these papyri evidence variants where the TR and NA 28 text disagree, in almost every single instance these papyri agree with the NA 28 against the TR. Burgon's historical contention simply is not sustainable today. And in either case, his contention was ultimately that the TR was manifestly in error at many points.

⁴⁰ Wilber Pickering, an MT advocate, has sought to apply Burgon's text critical principles, (see chapter 7 of "The Identity of the NT text," and chapter 8, fn. 2), known as the "7 Tests of Truth" to the text of the NT. He has suggested that doing such, instead of requiring the 1800 changes to the TR that Hodges-Farstad proposed, would result instead in about 1500 changes to the TR. No one can say with integrity that they hold Burgon's view of the text of the NT if they believe the TR or the KJV perfect.

to what today is referred to as the “majority text position.” This position is still diametrically opposed to a “TR only” position, or any absolutist position which believes it has a text identical to the original autographs, and this position requires changes to the TR in well over 1800 places, as we have seen. (Pickering suggested that applying Burgon’s principles today would require correcting the TR in 1,500 places, about a third of which would require changes in the KJV). Further, Burgon’s is a position which demands that we acknowledge uncertainty about thousands of textual variants. It strikes me as something far less than an act of integrity when someone advocates a perfect TR and appeals to Burgon for support. On the basis of his bibliology alone, even as careful and conservative a scholar as Burgon would absolutely not agree to an absolutists textual position.

Burgon made clear that he would consider such a claim to be madness resulting from someone not actually reading what he wrote.