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BIBLE CLASS DEPARTMENT

THE THREE WITNESSES

“There are three that bear record in Heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.”—1 John 5:7.

In Lange’s Critical Commentary, in reference to this passage we read: Said words are wanting in ALL THE GREEK CODICES; also in the CODEX SINAITICUS [the oldest existing MSS] AND IN ALL THE ANCIENT VERSIONS, INCLUDING THE LATIN, as late as the 8th century; and since that time they are found in three variations. Notwithstanding the Trinitarian controversies they are NOT REFERRED TO BY A SINGLE GREEK FATHER OR BY ANY OF THE OLD LATIN CHURCH FATHERS.

The American Bible Union version [probably the best modern translation] leaves out the passage and adds the foot note, *“The words omitted are wanting in all ancient copies.”*

They are pronounced an interpolation by such authorities as Sir Isaac Newton, Benson, Clarke, Horne, Griesbach, Tischendorf and Alford.

In Hudson’s Greek and English concordance we read: “The words are found in no Greek MSS. before the 15th or 16th century, and in no early version, unless, says Alford, pure caprice is to be followed in the criticism of the sacred text; *there is not a shadow of reason for supposing them genuine*. Tischendorf says, that this spurious addition should continue to be published as a part of the epistle, I regard as an impiety, etc.; and President T. B. Woolsey: “Do not truth and honesty require that such a passage should be struck out of our English Bibles; a passage which Luther would not express in his translation, and which did not creep into the German Bible until nearly fifty years after his death?”

Dr. Adam Clarke, the learned Methodist commentator, in his notes on this passage, says: “It is likely this verse is not genuine. It is wanting in every MS. of this epistle written *before* the invention of printing, one excepted—*condex motfortii*, in Trinity College, Dublin; the others which omit this verse amount to *one hundred and twelve*. It is wanting in both the Syriac, all the Arabic, Ethiopic, the Coptic, Sahidic, Armenian, Slavonian, etc.; in a word, in all the ancient *versions* but the *Vulgate*; and even of this version many of the most ancient and correct MSS. have it not. It is wanting, also, in all the ancient Greek Fathers; and in most even of the Latin. ... To make the

whole more clear, that every reader may see what has been added, I shall set down these verses, with the *inserted* words in brackets:

“6. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7. For there are three that bore record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. 8. And there are three that bear witness on earth.] the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one. 9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater,” etc. Any man may see on examining the *words* that if those included in brackets, which are wanting in the MSS., and *versions* be omitted, there is no want of *connection*; and as to the *sense*, it is complete and perfect without them, and, indeed, much more so than with them. I shall conclude this part of the note with observing, with Dr. Dodd, “That there are some intervals and accidental remarks which may render the passage suspected, for the sentence is complete, and the sense more clear and better preserved without it. Besides, the Spirit is mentioned, both as a witness in heaven and on earth; so that the six witnesses are thereby reduced to five, and the equality in number or antithesis between the witnesses in heaven and on earth is quite taken away. Besides, what need of witnesses in *heaven*? No one there doubts that Jesus is the Messiah, and if it be said that Father, Son, and Spirit are witnesses on earth, then there are five witnesses on earth, and none in heaven; not to say that there is a little difficulty in interpreting how the Word or the Son can be a witness to him.

W. I. M.

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