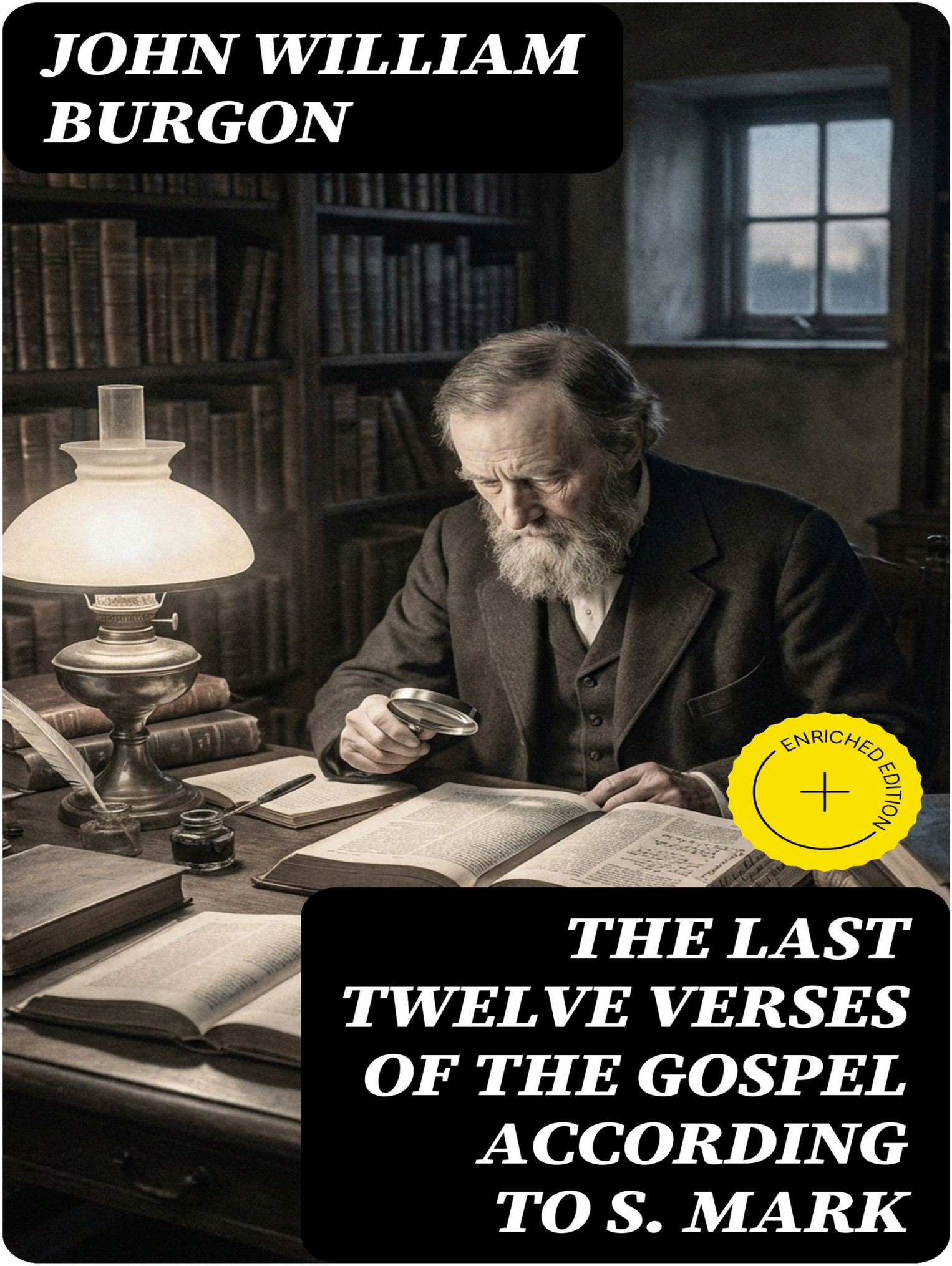
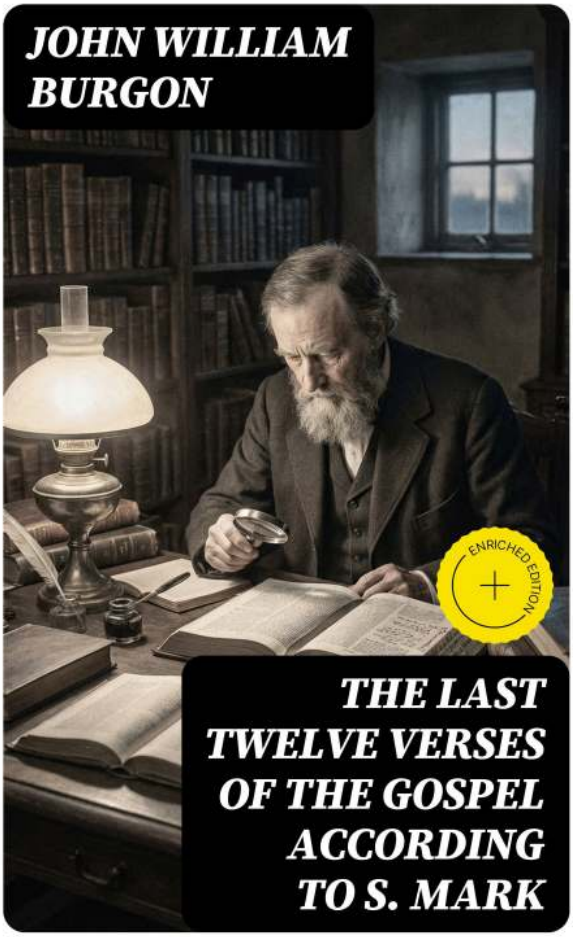
JOHN WILLIAM BURGON




# THE LAST TWELVE VERSES OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO S. MARK


JOHN WILLIAM BURGON
ENRICHED EDITION
THE LAST TWELVE VERSES OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO S. MARK

**John William Burgon**

# The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Oliver Hilton*

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# Introduction

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At stake in John William Burgon’s study is whether the Church receives its Gospel endings from the flux of manuscripts or the deeper continuity of Christian memory. The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark examines the contested conclusion of Mark’s Gospel, a passage present in many witnesses and absent in others, and treats the dispute as a test case for how sacred texts are authenticated. Burgon writes not as a neutral compiler but as an advocate who believes the ending belongs to the canonical text, yet he invites readers to weigh the evidence, methods, and assumptions that drive textual decisions.

As a nineteenth-century work of biblical textual criticism, the book enters a period when new manuscript discoveries and evolving editorial practices were reshaping New Testament scholarship in Britain and beyond. Burgon, an English churchman and scholar, composes a sustained monograph that reads like a legal brief—methodical, source-heavy, and intent on establishing priority across conflicting testimonies. He addresses learned audiences accustomed to footnotes, catalogues, and technical distinctions, yet he remains attentive to pastoral implications. The publication belongs to the era increasingly defined by critical editions and debates over canons of evidence, setting Burgon’s argument within the broader contest of authority in modern biblical studies.

The premise is straightforward: the final twelve verses attributed to Mark are examined through every accessible channel of testimony, and their status is argued from cumulative, converging lines of proof. Readers encounter an assertive voice that nonetheless pauses to explain terminology, sift data, and anticipate objections. The style alternates between closely reasoned chapters and extensive notes, often moving from big-picture framing to granular casework. The tone is confident, occasionally combative, but consistently scholarly, aiming to persuade rather than merely to catalogue. The result is a demanding yet lucid reading experience that rewards patient attention to details and to the architecture of argument.

Among the book’s central themes is the relationship between textual evidence and ecclesial reception, explored through questions about manuscripts, early translations, and patristic citations. Burgon highlights how written artifacts interact with living use, arguing that readings embedded in worship and teaching warrant serious historical regard. Another theme is method: what counts as sufficient proof, how to balance quality and quantity of witnesses, and how internal considerations relate to external testimony. The study also reflects on continuity and change in Christian doctrine and practice, insisting that judgments about text are never isolated from assumptions about authority, community, and historical memory.

Burgon’s procedure moves deliberately from external to internal considerations. He surveys ancient manuscripts alongside early versions and citations in early Christian writers, then examines how the disputed verses function

within the Gospel’s rhetoric and theology. He considers liturgical and lectionary usage as evidence of long-standing reception, and he tests whether patterns of omission or addition could explain the textual variation. Throughout, he engages contemporary critics and frames alternate explanations before proposing his own. The analysis neither denies the existence of divergent witnesses nor minimizes their importance; rather, it seeks to weigh them within a broader, historically textured account of transmission.

For contemporary readers, the book matters because questions about what counts as the text of Scripture continue to shape preaching, translation, and personal devotion. It offers a case study in how scholarship handles uncertainty, showing the interplay of data, inference, and values when evidence is fragmentary. The debates Burgon addresses anticipate ongoing discussions about editorial criteria, the role of early communities, and the limits of methodological confidence. Even where readers differ from his conclusions, they will find a rigorous model of argumentation and a reminder that textual decisions are never merely technical; they carry implications for theology, liturgy, and trust.

Approached today, the volume invites measured reading rather than quick verdicts, encouraging attention to sources, definitions, and the structure of claims. Its value lies not only in its defense of the contested passage but in its exposure of how scholars marshal cumulative evidence across disciplines. Readers will meet a vigorous advocate who also demonstrates the patience required by historical inquiry. They will see how arguments are built, tested, and

revised in light of competing testimonies. In this way, the book serves both as a focused contribution to Markan studies and as an enduring tutorial in critical, principled engagement with sacred texts.

# Synopsis

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Published in 1871, John William Burgon’s The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark is a sustained examination of Mark 16:9–20 amid nineteenth-century debates about New Testament textual history. Burgon focuses on whether these verses belong to the Evangelist’s Gospel, assembling manuscript, versional, patristic, and liturgical data. He frames the question as both historical and methodological: how should conflicting witnesses be weighed, and what constitutes sufficient proof for excising a long-received passage? The book proceeds systematically, confronting objections then current in critical circles and setting out principles by which, he contends, the evidence must be assessed.

Burgon first surveys external documentary evidence. He acknowledges that two early Greek codices conclude Mark at 16:8, a fact heavily emphasized by some scholars of his era. Against this, he draws attention to the preponderance of later Greek manuscripts that contain 16:9–20, along with a broad array of ancient translations that likewise include the passage. He argues that multiplicity and distribution of witnesses over time and geography deserve significant weight. While not dismissing the importance of early manuscripts, he cautions against erecting a judgment on a narrow base when a larger tradition attests continued and widespread reception.

Turning to patristic testimony, Burgon assembles citations from early Christian writers to show that the longer ending was known and used. He highlights especially the second-century witness of Irenaeus, who refers to material found in Mark 16:19, as evidence for the passage's antiquity. He also treats comments by Eusebius and Jerome, often cited to suggest uncertainty, contending that their remarks have been misunderstood and do not amount to a settled rejection. Complementing these references, he adduces lectionary practice and ecclesiastical usage to argue that the verses were long embedded in the church's reading and teaching of the Gospel.

Burgon then addresses internal considerations. He engages claims that the language, style, and narrative flow of Mark 16:9–20 diverge from the rest of the Gospel. He analyzes vocabulary, thematic motifs, and transitions, arguing that perceived anomalies are neither unique nor decisive. The abrupt termination at 16:8, he maintains, creates unresolved tensions within the narrative and in early Christian proclamation, whereas the longer ending supplies a coherent closure. Rather than proving late composition, he suggests that stylistic observations must be weighed cautiously and in the context of how ancient authors concluded historical narratives.

At the level of method, Burgon critiques tendencies he sees in contemporary textual criticism to privilege a small set of early manuscripts over the cumulative testimony of the document tradition. He advocates balancing age with breadth of attestation, consistency of transmission, and ecclesial reception. He cautions against conjectural

explanations that remove a long-accepted text on slender grounds, urging that omissions may stem from accidental loss or local disturbances. For him, the question is not settled by a single criterion but by converging lines of evidence—Greek copies, versions, patristic usage, and liturgical incorporation—considered together.

Burgon also engages alternative explanations of the textual phenomena. He considers reports of manuscripts that end at 16:8 and others that present different endings, evaluating whether such forms reflect editorial activity or transmission irregularities. Responding to objections about doctrine or the presence of miraculous themes, he situates the content of 16:9–20 within the wider New Testament witness. He contends that theological or harmonizing concerns do not require positing a late addition. Throughout, he maintains that the best historical account of the evidence is the longstanding inclusion of the longer ending in the Gospel's text and use.

The book closes by urging sober judgment about the limits of our evidence and the responsibilities of criticism. Without denying complexities in the manuscript record, Burgon presses for conclusions that respect the breadth of Christian literary and liturgical testimony. His study's significance lies less in settling every question than in modeling a comprehensive case for continuity in transmission. The work remains a touchstone in debates about Mark's ending, illustrating how manuscript, versional, patristic, and ecclesial data may be integrated, and reminding readers that textual decisions shape how the Church and academy receive Scripture over time.

# Historical Context

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John William Burgon’s The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark was published in London in 1871, during the high Victorian period. Burgon (1813–1888), then vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford (1863–1873), wrote within the intertwined settings of the University of Oxford, the Church of England, and Britain’s expanding learned presses. The book emerged from a culture of intensive classical and biblical study fostered in Oxford colleges and national repositories such as the Bodleian Library and the British Museum. It addressed a scholarly dispute that had become a public ecclesiastical question.

By the mid-nineteenth century, textual criticism of the New Testament had been transformed by access to early manuscripts. Constantin von Tischendorf’s discovery and publication of Codex Sinaiticus (portions found in 1844 and 1859; facsimile issued 1862) and increased scholarly access to Codex Vaticanus brought unprecedented evidence to bear on disputed passages. Both codices end Mark at 16:8, omitting the familiar longer ending (16:9–20). Other witnesses present a brief “shorter ending.” At the same time, ancient versions such as the Vulgate and the Syriac Peshitta, and many later Greek manuscripts, included the long ending, setting up a complex evidential landscape.

Debate over Mark’s ending long predated Burgon. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors and critics,

including Johann Jakob Griesbach, Karl Lachmann, Tischendorf, Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, and Henry Alford, questioned the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20 on external and internal grounds. Patristic testimony was divided: Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome noted that many Greek copies ended at 16:8, while other Fathers, notably Irenaeus in the late second century and later Augustine, explicitly cited verses from the longer ending. The presence or absence of the passage in manuscripts, early translations, and church usage became a test case for critical method.

In England, these textual questions unfolded amid wider disputes about biblical authority. Essays and Reviews (1860) and Bishop John William Colenso's critical writings on the Pentateuch stirred legal and ecclesial controversy, sharpening anxieties about historical criticism. Within this climate, Burgon, a vigorous Anglican controversialist, defended traditional views of Scripture in sermons and pamphlets and engaged opponents in print. Oxford's intellectually charged environment—where classical philology, patristics, and theology intersected—furnished him with tools and audiences. His book on Mark's ending thus addressed not only specialists but clergy and educated lay readers concerned about the reliability of the Gospel text.

The ecclesiastical framework also shifted in 1870, when the Convocation of Canterbury resolved to revise the Authorized Version, forming new translation companies. Influential scholars such as Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort joined the New Testament committee, bringing a developing preference for a small group of early

manuscripts. The resulting debates over method and authority reverberated in universities and parishes. Burgon’s 1871 volume arrived early in this process, contesting critical conclusions that were gaining institutional traction and anticipating later disputes surrounding the Revised Version of 1881 and the prominence accorded to Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.

Methodologically, nineteenth-century textual criticism balanced external witnesses, internal probabilities, and genealogies of text-types. Editors such as Lachmann and Tischendorf prioritized earlier uncials and posited families of readings, trends that would culminate in later theories. Burgon countered by foregrounding the cumulative weight of patristic citations, ancient versions, lectionaries, and the broad medieval manuscript tradition, along with practical considerations of ecclesial usage. Working from major libraries—Alexandrinus at the British Museum and extensive patristic collections in Oxford were close at hand—he marshaled evidence to argue that the long ending’s reception across centuries demanded more deference than contemporary critics allowed.

The work also reflects the post-Tractarian valuation of the early Church in Anglican scholarship. Since the Oxford Movement of the 1830s, patristic authorities, liturgical practice, and continuity with antiquity had been freshly emphasized in university study and church life. Burgon’s appeal to Fathers and lectionaries therefore resonated with audiences trained to respect antiquity as a theological guide. Yet his combative tone aligned with contemporary pamphlet culture and review journalism, where scholarly

disputes were fought vigorously before a literate public. In this milieu, questions of variant readings carried pastoral implications, touching preaching, catechesis, and the tone of apologetics.

Taken together, these contexts explain the urgency and shape of Burgon’s intervention. The Last Twelve Verses of S. Mark gathers manuscript, patristic, and versional data to challenge a rising critical consensus and to reassure readers that longstanding ecclesial reception still bore weight. It mirrors Victorian scholarship’s rigor while critiquing its narrowing reliance on a few early codices. The book thus stands at a crossroads: between Oxford’s humanistic tradition and modern scientific method, between ecclesiastical continuity and revision, and between specialist debate and pastoral concern—a portrait of how nineteenth-century England negotiated scripture, authority, and historical evidence.

# The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark

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# The Codex

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On the next page is exhibited an *exact Fac-simile*, obtained by Photography, of fol. 28 *b* of the Codex Sinaiticus[1] at S. Petersburg, (Tischendorf's 2]א]): shewing the abrupt termination of S. Mark's Gospel at the words ΕΦΟΒΟΥΝΤΟ ΓΑΡ (chap. xvi. 8), as explained at p. 70, and pp. 86-8. The original Photograph, which is here reproduced on a diminished scale, measures in height full fourteen inches and one-eighth; in breadth, full thirteen inches. It was procured for me through the friendly and zealous offices of the English Chaplain at S. Petersburg, the Rev. A. S. Thompson, B.D.; by favour of the Keeper of the Imperial Library, who has my hearty thanks for his liberality and consideration.

It will be perceived that the text begins at S. Mark xvi. 2, and ends with the first words of S. Luke i. 18.

Up to this hour, every endeavour to obtain a Photograph of the corresponding page of the Codex Vaticanus[3], B, (No. 1209, in the Vatican,) has proved unavailing. If the present Vindication of the genuineness of Twelve Verses of the everlasting Gospel should have the good fortune to approve itself to his Holiness, Pope Pius IX., let me be permitted in this unadorned and unusual manner,—(to which I would fain add some circumstance of respectful ceremony if I knew how,)—very humbly to entreat his Holiness to allow me to possess a Photograph, corresponding in size with the original, of the page of Codex B (it is numbered fol. 1303,) which exhibits the abrupt termination of the Gospel according to S. Mark.

J. W. B.

Oriel College, Oxford,
*June 14, 1871*.

# "My Word Will Not Pass Away"

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ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν,
ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ,
ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου,
ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται.

εὐκοπώτερον δέ ἐστι
τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν παρελθεῖν,
ἢ τοῦ νόμου μίαν κεραίαν πεσεῖν.

ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται,
οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρέλθωσι.

καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφαιρῇ
ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων βίβλου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης
ἀφαιρήσει ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ
ἀπὸ βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς,
καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας,
καὶ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

# Dedication: To Sir Roundell Palmer, Q.C., M.P.

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Dear Sir Roundell,

I do myself the honour of inscribing this volume to you. Permit me to explain the reason why.

It is not merely that I may give expression to a sentiment of private friendship which dates back from the pleasant time when I was Curate to your Father,—whose memory I never recall without love and veneration;—nor even in order to afford myself the opportunity of testifying how much I honour you for the noble example of conscientious uprightness and integrity which you set us on a recent public occasion. It is for no such reason that I dedicate to you this vindication of the last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to S. Mark.

It is because I desire supremely to submit the argument contained in the ensuing pages to a practised judicial intellect of the loftiest stamp. Recent Editors of the New Testament insist that these “last Twelve Verses” are not genuine. The Critics, almost to a man, avow themselves of the same opinion. Popular Prejudice has been for a long

time past warmly enlisted on the same side. I am as convinced as I am of my life, that the reverse is the truth. It is not even with me as it is with certain learned friends of mine, who, admitting the adversary's premisses, content themselves with denying the validity of his inference. However true it may be,—and it is true,—that from those premisses the proposed conclusion does not follow, I yet venture to deny the correctness of those premisses altogether. I insist, on the contrary, [pg vi] that the Evidence relied on is untrustworthy,—untrustworthy in every particular.

How, in the meantime, can such an one as I am hope to persuade the world that it is as I say, while the most illustrious Biblical Critics at home and abroad are agreed, and against me? Clearly, the first thing to be done is to secure for myself a full and patient hearing. With this view, I have written a book**[1q]**. But next, instead of waiting for the slow verdict of Public Opinion, (which yet, I know, must come after many days,) I desiderate for the Evidence I have collected, a competent and an impartial Judge. And *that* is why I dedicate my book to you. If I can but get this case fairly tried, I have no doubt whatever about the result.

Whether you are able to find time to read these pages, or not, it shall content me to have shewn in this manner the confidence with which I advocate my cause; the kind of test to which I propose to bring my reasonings. If I may be allowed to say so,—*S. Mark's last Twelve Verses shall no longer remain a subject of dispute among men.* I am able to prove that this portion of the Gospel has been declared to

be spurious on wholly mistaken grounds: and this ought in fairness to close the discussion. But I claim to have done more. I claim to have shewn, from considerations which have been hitherto overlooked, that its genuineness must needs be reckoned among the things that are absolutely certain.

I am, with sincere regard and respect,
Dear Sir Roundell,
Very faithfully yours,
JOHN W. BURGON.

ORIEL,
July, 1871.



# PREFACE.

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16th century (literally ‘received text’) that formed the textual basis for many early modern translations, including the King James Version.

**37** A Latin title meaning 'Questions to Marinus,' this is the short work attributed to Eusebius (or preserved under his name) that discusses points of Gospel interpretation; the passage cited is printed in Mai's 19th-century edition (Nova Patrum Bibliotheca, vol. iv.).

**38** Refers to Cardinal Angelo Mai (1782–1854), an Italian scholar and editor who published many patristic texts in the 19th century, including the Nova Patrum Bibliotheca referenced here.

**39** Hesychius here denotes a Byzantine biblical commentator invoked in the text; the name applies to several late-antique and medieval writers, so the precise author can be uncertain but is generally understood as a patristic commentator active roughly between the 5th and 9th centuries.

**40** Victor of Antioch was a commentator, usually dated to the 5th century, known for a Greek commentary on the Gospel of Mark that was used by later compilers and catenae writers and is cited here as a source.

**41** The name under which many medieval manuscripts ascribe the Greek commentary on St. Mark; the author is otherwise unknown and is described in the text as a presbyter of Antioch and a compiler who drew on earlier Fathers, with an approximate date proposed at A.D. 430–450.

**42** A patristic term meaning a 'chain' of brief excerpts from earlier commentators arranged as a continuous

commentary on Scripture, often without clear indication of individual authorship.

**43** A Latin phrase meaning 'by leaping' or 'skipping over,' used here to describe abrupt transitions or omissions in manuscript copies that jump from one part of a passage to another.

**44** Victor of Antioch was an ancient Greek commentator known for a running commentary (scholia) on the Gospel of Mark, usually dated to the late 5th century (with some estimates extending into the 6th); his work is often cited in discussions of the authenticity of Mark's longer ending.

**45** The Eusebian Canons are a system of ten tables devised by Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4th century) that organize and cross-reference parallel passages in the four Gospels, typically indicated by sectional numbers or marginal references in ancient manuscripts.

**46** The Diatessaron is a gospel-harmony that combines material from the four canonical Gospels into a single continuous narrative; it is most famously associated with Tatian in the mid-2nd century, though related harmonizing efforts (e.g. by Ammonius) also appear in the early patristic period.

**47** Tatian was a 2nd-century Syrian Christian writer (active mid-100s AD) who compiled the Diatessaron, a harmony of the four Gospels, and later became associated in patristic sources with heterodox teachings.

**48** A "scholion" is a marginal note or brief commentary; the phrase "Scholion of Eusebius" here refers to a marginal remark attributed to Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–340), the early church historian, although the author of this chapter

argues that the particular scholion in the manuscripts is a later epitome or interpolation rather than Eusebius's original writing.

**49** 'Bobbiensis' is a Latin adjectival name meaning 'of Bobbio', used to denote a manuscript or version associated with the Abbey of Bobbio (Italy) that serves as a witness in New Testament textual studies; the exact manuscript and its dating vary among scholars and editions.

**50** A Syriac revision of the New Testament traditionally associated with Philoxenus of Mabbug (late 5th–early 6th century); it was produced for use in Syriac-speaking churches and is cited in textual studies of Syriac biblical manuscripts.

**51** Abp. Tait refers to Archibald Campbell Tait (1811–1882), who served as Archbishop of Canterbury in the 19th century and published theological writings such as Harmony of Revelation and the Sciences (1864).

**52** The Codex Bobbiensis (siglum k) is an ancient Latin Gospel manuscript associated with the monastery of Bobbio and cited in New Testament textual criticism; its precise date is debated, but it is generally treated as an early (late antique/early medieval) witness to the Latin text.

**53** ‘Victor Antioch’ (Victor of Antioch) is an author traditionally dated to around the 5th century who compiled a catena (a running collection of earlier commentaries) on the Gospel of Mark, often cited by later editors and textual critics.

**54** A manuscript identifier (Codex 300) used by textual critics to refer to a specific Gospel manuscript; such ‘Cod.’ numbers denote individual hand-copied volumes (often

medieval Greek minuscules) whose dates and provenance vary by case.

**55** A siglum referring to a specific uncial manuscript designated by the Greek letter Lambda (Λ); in New Testament apparatuses ‘Cod. Λ’ names that particular majuscule codex of the Gospels, whose exact date and location depend on palaeographic assignment.

**56** Short for the Ammonian Sections, a system (attributed to Ammonius of Alexandria) of dividing the four Gospels into numbered sections used for cross-referencing, later incorporated into Eusebius’s canon tables; the scheme is generally dated to the early centuries of the Christian era.

**57** An Old Latin (Vetus Latina) Gospel manuscript known as the Bobbiensis and conventionally siglaed ‘k’; it is part of the pre-Vulgate Latin witness tradition used by textual critics of the New Testament.

**58** 'Cod. Bobbiensis' is the conventional short title (a codex) used in New Testament textual criticism to denote a specific manuscript cited for variant readings (here given the siglum 'k'); it is treated as an ancient witness to readings of the Gospels in critical apparatuses.

**59** The 'Philoxenian margin' refers to marginal notes or readings found in the Philoxenian Syriac version — a revision of the Syriac Gospels associated with Philoxenus of Mabbug and used as an important early Syriac witness in textual studies (typically dated to the early 6th century).

**60** A well-known bilingual (Greek and Latin) uncial manuscript of the Gospels and Acts, traditionally labelled D or 'Codex Bezae', usually dated to about the 5th century (dates sometimes given as 5th–6th century) and noted for