

ARTICLE II.

WICLIF'S BIBLE HONORED BY THE REVISION.

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It is not for a moment to be supposed that the latest revision of our English Bible is no improvement over its first translation. It is, however, surprising to find how often the wisdom of the nineteenth century has come back to the rendering of the wise master-builder of the fourteenth. Such returns take place in some very important passages, as well as in multitudes of less prominent instances. These returns are the more interesting because so nearly unintentional. The revisers, if I may judge from the personal letters of two prominent members, one of the Old Testament American committee, and the other of the New, did not make much use of Wiclif's Bible, passing it by for the most part as a translation of a translation made a hundred and fifty years before our English Bible began with Tyndale.¹

These returns are so frequent that one who would give a few specimens is at a loss which to select amongst so many. I will cite some from different portions of both Testaments. When our revisers changed "borrow" into "ask," in Ex. xii. 35, thereby relieving the Israelites from the implication of deceiving the Egyptians, they returned to Wiclif's rendering. The change in Ex. xxxviii. 8, in the description of the donors of the mirrors from "assembling women which assembled" to "serving women which served," brought back the reading nearer to Wiclif's description of them, as those who "watchiden" (watched). In Lev. xvi. 21, Wiclif described the one who should lead the goat out into the wilderness as "a man alreedy." The King James speaks of him as "a fit man," but

¹ Westcott, *Hist. Eng. Bible.* p. 25.

the revision returns substantially to the first translation and reads, "a man that is in readiness." In Num. vi. 20, the word "thigh" in the revision agrees with Wiclif's "hippe" rather than with the King James reading, "shoulder." In Num. xxiii. 28, the revision reading "desert" instead of a proper name, as in the King James, comes back very close to Wiclif, who makes Peor look out upon "the wilderness."

When the revision, in Num. xxiv. 3, shut Balaam's eyes that the King James had left open, it went back to John Wiclif; and when, in Deut. xxxii. 11, it represented the Almighty as spreading forth his wings, and not merely as being like a bird that does so, the new rendering was but a restoration of Wiclif's ornithomorphism, if I may be indulged the word. When, in 2 Kings viii. 13, the revisers made Hazael's exclamation one of feigned humility, instead of the humane indignation which the King James expressed, they reverted to Wiclif's idea, who reads, "What forsothe am I, thi seruant, an hound, that I doo this grete thinge." In 2 Kings ix. 30, the revision rendering, so faithful to eastern custom, "she painted her eyes," rather than "she painted her face," as in the 1611 version, is only the restoration of a reading five hundred years older, though Wiclif has a vigorous addition and reads, "peyntye hyre eeyen with strumpettis oynment." In 2 Kings xix. 7, the revision displaces the word "blast" of the authorized version with Wiclif's word, "spirit," and reads, "I will put a spirit in him." In Psa. xxiv. 6, the change in the revision whereby the preceding verses become a description of him who seeks the face, not of Jacob, but of Jacob's God, is a return to Wiclif, and so is the graphic rendering in Psa. xxix. 9, "in his temple every thing saith, Glory."

In order to appreciate the frequency of the points in which the first English Bible anticipated our revision and the minuteness of some of the anticipations, let us compare the two in the second part of Isaiah a little more in

detail. In Isa. liv. 12, Wiclif wrote "pinnacles," as the revision reads, and not "windows," which is the King James word. Wiclif, in Isa. lv. 10, does not speak of the intermediate agency of the earth as the King James does, but attributes the harvest directly to the rain and the snow. The revision agrees with Wiclif here. Wiclif anticipated the revision with "peoples" in the plural, as in Isa. lx. 2. In Isa. lxi. 3, Wiclif and the revision agree in using the more definite word; Wiclif has "crown," the revision, "garland." The King James has the less precise term "beauty"—"beauty for ashes." More striking are the following anticipations, or rather reversions. When the revision changed "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain," Isa. xl. 9, into "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion," etc., thus making Zion the recipient instead of the herald of the good news, it returned to Wiclif, who rendered, "thou that evangelists to Zion," etc.

Notice the often quoted words of the King James version in Isa. lix. 19, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Our revisers felt bound, in loyalty to the strongest probability, to remit this fountain of hope for dark days to the margin, and to put in the text "for he [that is, God] shall come as a rushing stream which the breath of the Lord driveth," but this is only a return for substance to the reading of the first English Bible. That had "when he [that is, God] shal come as a violent flod whom the spirit of the Lord constreyneth." When the revision made sense of Isa. lxxv. 11, by substituting for the blind reading "prepare a table for that troop," "prepare a table for Fortune," that is, spread a sacrificial meal before the image of the heathen divinity, Fortune, the rendering was not new, for Wiclif had "putten [that is, spread] the bord [that is, table] of Fortune."

In Hosea vi. 7, the revision gives aid and comfort to the believers in Adam's federal headship by reading

"Adam" instead of "man," as it was in the King James, so that the passage now stands "but they like Adam have transgressed the covenant," but John Wiclif rendered "Adam." These examples from the Old Testament might be multiplied.

In the New Testament the revision returns to the first translation very often. The happy substitution of "teaching" for "doctrine," in Matt. vii. 28 and so many subsequent passages, is a return to Wiclif, who in the passage cited and usually has that pure Saxon word. Wiclif read "weren fasting" in Mark ii. 18, making the statement refer to something then taking place, and not merely to a custom of the Pharisees and John's disciples. Here Wiclif and the revision agree against the King James.

The beautiful change in Luke iii. 18, by which even the Baptist's stern preaching is said to have had an element of "good tidings," was anticipated by Wiclif with the rendering, "euangeliside to the people,"—compare his use of the verb as quoted from Isa. xl. 9. In Luke viii. 18, Wiclif anticipated the revision with "he gessith himself to haue" (have),—the King James reading is "seemeth to have." In Luke x. 6, the change in the revision from "the son of peace" to "a son of peace" is a return to Wiclif, and so is the striking substitution of "Holy Spirit" for "spirit" in the twenty-first verse of the same chapter. In the Gospel of John the revision goes back to Wiclif in x. 15, when it makes the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son the type of that which holds between the Good Shepherd and his flock; and the new reading in xiv. 22, "Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?" is practically a restoration of Wiclif's rendering, though his is terser, "Lord, what is done," etc. In Acts xvi. 7, Wiclif and our revisers agree in the reading "Spirit of Jesus," where the 1611 version has "Holy Ghost;" and in Acts xix. 38 Wiclif and the revision agree in the accurate word "proconsuls," where the 1611 version has "deputies."

I will consider the points of agreement a little more fully in Acts, chapters xxii.-xxviii., as I did in Isa. xl.-lxvi., and this fuller examination may give an idea of the of the number of returns to Wiclif in the revised New Testament, as that would in the revised Old Testament. I select these two portions, not because, so far as I am aware, such returns are specially frequent in them, but because I have had occasion to give them special study for other purposes. Wiclif read "witness" (Acts xxii. 20), not "martyr;" "son of Pharisees" (xxiii. 6), not "the son of a Pharisee;" did not have (xxiii. 9) "let us not fight against God;" had the stronger word "taste" in the vow of Paul's enemies (xxiii. 14), not "eat;" read "things ben amended" (xxiv. 2), not "very worthy deeds are done;" had "no more than eight ether [or] ten days" (xxv. 6), not "more than ten days;" read "country" (xxvi. 9), not "coasts;" had "all that had sicknesses" (xxviii. 9), not simply "others." At all these points Wiclif and the revision agree against the King James.

In Rom. viii. 26, Wiclif anticipated the revision with "infirmity" in the singular and the absence of a neuter pronoun referring to the Holy Spirit, and read, "all the churches" (Rom. xvi. 16), as does the revision, and not simply "the churches," as the authorized version has it. In 1 Cor. iv. 4, when our revisers displaced the blind reading "I know nothing by myself" with "I know nothing against myself," they went back to the substance of Wiclif's "I am no thing guilty to myself;" and their omission (1 Cor. vi. 20) of "and in your spirit, which are God's," brings the text back to Wiclif's rendering; and when they struck out "easily" from 1 Cor. xiii. 5, so that it should read "is not provoked," they went back to Wiclif again. The interesting change in Eph. iii. 15, which makes every family of earth typical of the divine fatherhood, and whispers of its perpetuity in that world where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, if it pattern after its ideal, is but a return to Wiclif, who read,

not "the whole family," but "ech fadirheed" (each fatherhood). The stronger expression of Paul's appreciation of being with his dear Lord, in the revision of Phil. i. 23, is but the restoration substantially of Wiclif's "moche more bettere." Wiclif's reading in Col. iv. 3, "that God opene to us the dore of word," is nearer the revision than the King James. In 2 Thess. iii. 1, Wiclif read, with the revision, "renne" (run) and not "have free course." In Heb. i. 3, the happy use of "substance" instead of the misleading word "person," with reference to the Godhead, was only the restoration of old John Wiclif's very word. The vivid revision reading (Heb. ii. 1) "drift away from them," in place of "let them slip," recalls Wiclif's "fleten [float] away." Wiclif had the present tense in Heb. ix. 9, not the past, and in Heb. xiii. 7 made the writer of the epistle remind his readers of "the goynge [going] out of lyuyng" (living, life) of their former faithful teachers, not of "the end of their conversation." In both these places Wiclif and the revision are at one against the version of 1611. In 2 Pet. ii. 18, the revision changed "those that were clean escaped" into "those who were just escaping," but the first translation ran, "hem [them] that a litel scapen." In Rev. xiv. 1, the new reading, "having his name and the name of his Father," for the old, "having his Father's name," is only a restoration of the oldest reading word for word; and the new reading in vs. 15 of the same chapter is a return to the sense of Wiclif's quaint rendering, "for the rype corn of erthe driede."

The following fact shows how high honor the revisers paid Wiclif's Bible, albeit the tribute seems to have been an unconscious one. Out of fifty-six specimen changes cited by the *New York Tribune* just after the revised New Testament came out, I find by personal count that twenty-two, or about two-fifths, were returns to the first translation. In proportion to the smaller relative number of changes in the Old Testament, the respect shown Wiclif

is perhaps as great. All this was to the writer a startling discovery.

Something more should be said. Our revisers would have done better, in the humble judgment of the writer, if they had agreed with Wiclif in some places where they differ from him. In Isa. liii. 10, he renders, "If he shal put his soule for sin." This rendering emphasizes the voluntariness of our Lord's redemptive work, whose condition and glorious fruitage the verse states. The Hebrew *tdsim* freely permits this translation. Our revisers admit it to the margin, but stick to the King James in the text. Wiclif's reading in Isa. liv. 8, "In a moment of indignation I hid my face," is more faithful than the revision, "in an overflow of wrath," to the idea of a brief exhibition of wrath which the Hebrew gives in untranslatable terseness (*b'shetseph ketseph*). In Matt. xvi. 25, Wiclif renders "For he that wole make his soule saaf, *that is, his lyf* shal lese it, forsothe he that shal lese his soule *that is his lyf* for me shall fynde it." In verse 26 he has simply "soul." Purvey's revision of Wiclif's has simply "life" in verse 25, and "soul" in verse 26. The King James kept to the Wiclif-Purvey rendering, and our revision would have avoided a misleading translation had it done the same. In Rom. v. 1 Wiclif rendered "We haue pees." The revision would be free from one of its greatest infelicities had it kept company with the King James in adhering to this rendering, instead of changing it to "Let us have peace." An American's patriotic pride is gratified to find that our committee would have held fast to the old rendering. In Eph. iv. 11, in the list of our Lord's ascension gifts to his church, Wiclif has not "pastors," but "shepherds." Our revisers might well have returned to his reading. A Christian minister "compassed with infirmity" shrinks from bearing the same title with his blessed Lord, but he does not take

² Unless the contrary is stated, the references to Wiclif in this article are to the first translation, not Purvey's revision.

this honor unto himself. The inspired word gives it to him. Let him humbly wear it. It will remind him who is his model, and with what fidelity and love and self-devotion he is to tend the flock.

If our revisers put such honor upon Wiclif's Bible, and if at important points the first translation still takes the lead, a model and guide for future revisions, how does it happen that the intervening versions of these five centuries did not cleave to all its excellencies? Why should the fathers ever have departed from him for the worse at so many points where the children have come back to him? It is no answer to say that for a long time even Protestants did scant justice to the Reformation's "Morning Star." I have compared at some length these six versions,—Wiclif's, Tyndale's, the Genevan, the Bishops', the Anglo-Catholic, and the King James. I judge the following to be a fair illustration of their agreements and differences. I take the seven passages already cited from the Pentateuch as instances of a return to Wiclif by our revisers.* In those seven passages Tyndale agrees with Wiclif and the revision three times and differs from them four times; the Genevan agrees twice, differs five times; the Bishops' differs every time; the Anglo-Catholic agrees six times, differs once,—that is, the Anglo-Catholic agrees with Wiclif far more closely than do the great Protestant versions. The reason for this agreement was, of course, no admiration for Wiclif on the part of the Rheims-Douay translators,—far from it; but he and they drew from a common fountain, namely, the Vulgate, or Jerome's Latin version. The question remains, Why should men like Tyndale, who were of Wiclif's spiritual lineage, differ from him at so many points where our revisers agree with him. It would seem that although, unlike Wiclif, they went back to the original, their texts and their linguistic knowledge were at many points inferior to Jerome's. So our inquiry adds a laurel to the

* Ex. xii. 35; Ex. xxxviii. 8; Lev. xvi. 21; Num. vi. 20; Num. xxlii. 28; Num. xxiv. 3; Deut. xxxii. 11.

brow of the great father of translators, Jerome. In a multitude of readings our nineteenth century revision comes back into agreement with that marvellous translation which issued from Jerome's lowly cell in the limestone rock of Bethlehem fifteen hundred years ago. Jerome named his grotto Paradise, and there was a fitness in the name which he did not have in mind; for, like the earlier Paradise, his cave sent forth its river of water, even of the water of life. One is reminded of the tribute paid Jerome by another of the world's great Bible translators. Martin Luther detested Jerome's asceticism, but he said, "St. Jerome, in the matter of translating, has done more than any single man, and no one person can hope to come up with him."

But how is it about Wiclif? This article set out to show the honor paid Wiclif by our revision: is the ending to be honor to Jerome at Wiclif's expense? Not at all. John Wiclif's pre-eminence is not in Greek and Hebrew learning. He was *facile princeps* in the learning of his day, which Dante likens to a noble castle,

"Seven times encompassed with lofty walls,
Defended round by a fair rivulet."⁴

John Wiclif was master of those seven lofty walls, and drank freely of that fair rivulet, but, in common with all his countrymen, he knew nothing of Greek or Hebrew. His honor, his unique honor, is that he conceived and executed the great idea of giving his nation the word of God in their own tongue,—a tongue that his Bible itself did more than any other one cause to create and fashion. He did this, too, in the face of the deadly hostility of the mighty Romish Church. In doing it he made the best possible use of the means at his command. He took all pains to arrive at the original reading of the Vulgate, and then he used commentary and grammar to determine the meaning of the revised reading. All his literary activity was pervaded by a child-like dependence on the

⁴ The seven lofty walls are the *Trivium*: Logic, Grammar, Rhetoric, and the *Quadrivium*: Arithmetic, Astronomy, Geometry, Music. The fair rivulet is Eloquence.

illumination of the Holy Spirit, from whom the word had first come. He was no blind or slavish translator of Jerome. I will refer to two passages in proof of his thoughtfulness and independence as a translator, and of the divine light in which he wrought. Both have been already cited as superior to the revision. One is Matt. xvi. 25, 26. Jerome has simply *anima* in both places, but John Wiclif had the wisdom to perceive and to make plain to the English reader the different meaning of the word in the two verses. The second passage is Rom. v. 1. Here Jerome has, according to the authorized edition, *habeamus*—let us have—“being justified by faith, let us have peace with God;” but Wiclif rendered, as we have already seen, “we have peace.” The wisdom that cometh down from above taught him that peace with God is the certain, not contingent, result of justification by faith, and he followed that better light than Jerome’s.

This short study may be thus summarized: Wiclif translated Jerome, but with an independence that showed a divine guidance. Our intervening translators, though the superiority of their work as a whole is not questioned, in many instances differed from Wiclif for the worse, owing to the imperfect state of their texts and their knowledge of the original tongues. The revisers of our day have doubtless come nearer to the mind of the Spirit than any of their predecessors; but very many of their undoubted improvements are only restorations of Wiclif’s renderings, and if they had made more such restorations their work would have come nearer perfection. So John Wiclif’s name gains fresh honor from the biblical scholarship of to-day. The true aim and reward of all such scholarship is given in one of Wiclif’s prayers:—

“Help that thy holy Gospel may be known and held fast by thy simple brethren, and cause them to grow in faith and hope, in love and humility and patience, and with joy to suffer death for thee and for thy law. Amen, Lord Jesu, for thy mercy sake.”^b

^b Lechier’s Wiclif, p. 242.