

ARTICLE XI.

THE BIBLE AND THE COMMON MAN.¹

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WITH what an imperial and universal completeness the Book of Books is subduing the world! Even language itself is only a servant of the Message. Through long centuries and vast ranges of toil a race slowly and painfully fashions its speech; and no sooner is the work accomplished than that speech becomes the vehicle of the Tidings. To the Gospel it issues only as a new access to the hearts of men. Then sometimes the Book, like a great strategist, turns back for a moment, after generations of apparent rule, to complete more absolutely its dominion over territory which it has held historically, and to subdue more wholly unto its service some local or class dialect which the passing years have produced within the bounds of the larger language. And so the Word has its way and moves onward to the day when it shall have found lodgment among all tribes and on all tongues.

It is with such appreciation of the deeper meanings that one opens the comely and convenient volume which completes the "Twentieth Century New Testament." English has long been conquered territory to the Good News; or, to use another figure, it has long been a chosen vessel; it is half a millennium since the pioneer days of Wyclif, and the English Bible has

¹The Twentieth Century New Testament. A translation into modern English by a company of about twenty scholars, representing the various sections of the Christian Church. *Revised Edition.* New York, Chicago, and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company.

had a mighty history. But there has been growing up a new language within the English language. The common man, coming gradually to his own, has been coining his new speech. Tyndale and Coverdale would hardly understand him, and he would not understand them, were it not for this same Bible, which has held the two distant and divergent ages from absolute separation. And now that this common man is coming to be the moving spirit in English and American civilization it becomes one of the notable missionary efforts of our day to reach his ear, and through his ear his heart, with such a phrasing of the gospel as shall be its own best interpretation. This is the significant enterprise to which a little company of English scholars set themselves some years ago. Both the effort and the result are deeply interesting to any man who keeps his ear to the deeper movements of Christianity.

Like many to whom the work itself has been the best reward, these workmen have chosen to be unnamed. This is characteristic of the greater biblical scholarship. How many of the makers of the Bible, from the apostolic day down, have wrought in that absolute lack of self-consciousness which is begotten of the greatness of the service! Through the long years which the task has occupied, these workers have kept themselves well in the back-ground, and their work well to the fore. It has been generally understood that the initiating impulse to the effort came from that great Englishman, William T. Stead. One can readily believe this, for the undertaking is so evidently in line with the character of that man, whose life principle it has been to see things as they are, and to speak his word in such Anglo-Saxon that the commonest ear can understand it. Doubtless the anonymous character of the work has shielded the authors from the vexation of much useless intrusion and valueless criticism. On the other hand, it may well be

remembered that scholarship values a signature increasingly, not only as a testimonial of the correctness of the product, but also as giving important information as to the point of view assumed.

It is interesting, also, to know that the enterprise has been in large measure successful, and that this success has encouraged the prosecution of the work into the field of the Old Testament. One might easily fear that this translation would become simply the tool of the expert, as furnishing an interesting comparison with other versions. There is considerable question whether the common man does not rather delight to associate his religious life with an apartness which he loves to have emphasized in language and form. It is interesting, therefore, to know that in considerable measure this version is getting access to the country districts and to the men of common speech. The original edition was ten years in preparation. Issued then in three volumes, it reached a sale of 200,000 copies, and now, after three years of revision, the final edition, in one volume, is already having a phenomenal sale both in town and open country. With this measure of general interest it is natural that a like effort should be pushed in the Old Testament—a more difficult region to develop. A few months will probably see the publication of a tentative Old Testament. The apparent success of this attempt to reach the common ear must therefore be of great interest to a Christianity which at this moment is so vitally concerned for an approach to the masses. Has it not some important lessons to teach us?

Beyond the matter of its actual touch upon people, there remains, for the critic, the question of the real excellence of this version; and, inasmuch as the particular effort of the translators has been that of clothing the New Testament in the speech of the day, one is specially interested to measure the resultant

English style, and to estimate its approach to the ideal. It is true that the version might fail of being a great critical success, and yet achieve well this important end. It is an interesting fact in this connection, however, that the effort to be simple and direct has given a certain boldness and liberty which often evidently strikes nearer the real meaning than is possible to one who is limited by what has been held to be exact grammatical usage. Above grammar is sense. The necessary postulate of these translators is that the words carried a meaning to the ordinary hearer, and that this sense was made plain by the context rather than by any exact balancing of grammar. It has not been enough appreciated that the New Testament is not an exercise in Greek prose, where words have identical equivalents,¹ and the *kai* is always *kai*, but that it is first of all the hot and hurried rush of great souls in their campaign of eagerness to convey a noble contagion. Here, as elsewhere, it is the man of purpose, and the man who is in spiritual kinship with the purpose behind the Scriptures, who is the only true biblical interpreter. This may be scholastic heresy; it is actual fact.

But back to the style. The problem is a difficult one. In the first place, it is not easy to set one's self free from those forms of expression which the older versions have impressed upon us so deeply. Even when we think we have absolutely abandoned the past, we find ourselves unconsciously speaking its

¹Dr. Weymouth quotes approvingly from Bishop Welldon's "Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle": "I have deliberately rejected the principle of trying to translate the same Greek word by the same word in English, and where circumstances seem to call for it I have sometimes used two English words to represent one word of the Greek." Dr. Weymouth adds: "It is a melancholy spectacle to see men of high ability and undoubted scholarship toil and struggle at translation under a needless restriction to literality, as in intellectual handcuffs and fetters when they might with advantage snap the bonds and fling them away."

language, and declaring ourselves in the phraseology of 1611. Take the opening verses of the Acts. What Englishman, unless he had the echo of the King James Version in his ear, would write as do the "Twentieth Century" translators, "The first account which I drew up, Theophilus, dealt with all that Jesus did and taught from the very first down to that day on which he was taken up to Heaven, after he had, by the help of the Holy Spirit, given instruction to the Apostles whom he had chosen"! This is indeed better than the form given in the tentative edition. But it is the involved structure of the Old Version, with the added complication of a parted verb. The "Modern Speech New Testament" (Weymouth's translation) here, as in many other places, has succeeded better in shaking itself free from its memories, and we get at least a nearer approach to the natural and orderly expression: "My former narrative, Theophilus, dealt with all that Jesus did and taught as a beginning, down to the day on which, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles whom He had chosen, He was taken up to Heaven." All this suggests that twentieth-century words are no more necessary than a twentieth-century order in the phrasing. The classical scholar often loses his sense of the native English sentence-order when he preserves his English wording. Still the "Twentieth Century New Testament" has made distinct gain here, and one needs only a casual illustration to realize in what a foreign world he has been contentedly living. The King James Version (Acts i. 12) reads: "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey." The "Twentieth Century" (tentative edition) substituted: "Then the Apostles returned from the hill called Olivet to Jerusalem. It is about three quarters of a mile from the city." In the "Twentieth Century Revised" there is still

farther improvement: "Then the Apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called Olivet, which is about three quarters of a mile from the city." It is interesting to put beside this Weymouth's anglicizing of this simple passage: "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called the Oliveyard, which is near Jerusalem, about a mile off." All this is distinctly in the right direction.

As for the verbal colloquialisms, the revision of the "Twentieth Century" shows distinctly a conservative reaction from its earlier tendencies. The tentative edition often descended to the undignified, sometimes to the amusing. Not infrequently the changes seemed really unnecessary. But the revision has considerably removed these defects. There are comparatively few words employed which do not bear worthily the burden of their high and holy message. It is interesting to notice how in many points this effort has purified itself. It is not unlikely that attention was called to some of these infelicities by the striking series of articles on biblical translations which has appeared in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA*.¹ At any rate, "Our captain Cornelius" reappears instead of "Captain Cornelius." "It is not for you to know the times or dates" becomes "It is not for you to know the times or hours." "The Doings of the Apostles (commonly called 'the Acts')" appears again as "The Acts of the Apostles." "When they got there" is now "when they reached Jerusalem." "Yielding thirty, sixty, and a hundred times as much" is dignified again into "thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold." Herod is again a fox, whereas he was a vixen. Peter's mother-in-law was tentatively "down" with a fever; she is now "prostrate." According to Matthew, she

¹ Special attention should be called to this suggestive series of articles which appeared in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* (vols. lix.-lxi.), by Prof. H. M. Whitney.

“rose,” though unfortunately, according to Luke, she still “got up.” In the tentative edition the council of Heaven is composed of senators; now they are councillors. It is evident that these conservatisms are a decided gain.

There are certain passages of the New Testament which seem to find their only true expression in the stately diction of the more ancient English. Like a cathedral which the centuries have glorified and hallowed, these words of the earlier speech deepen the impressions, and add the atmosphere, of the abiding and the eternal. In them one worships best. It is hard to imagine these passages as worthily clothed in any speech that is not sanctified by something that dwells apart from the ordinary. We turn the leaves toward these passages with hesitation. In them is the supreme test. We wonder whether there are not certain places where, for the great multitude, mystery and majesty should be allowed to have their absolute way. We cannot know; we can only feel. Doubtless the translators felt this. They have touched these passages reverently—the last supper, the passion, the new morning in the garden, the serenities and timelessness of the church victorious. In these great passages there is good success.

“I heard, too, the number of those who had been sealed. It was one hundred and forty-four thousand; and they were from every tribe of the Israelites. . . . After this, in my vision, I saw a vast throng which no man could number, of men from every nation and of all tribes and peoples, and languages. They stood in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, robed in white, holding palm branches in their hands and they are crying in a loud voice—

‘Salvation be ascribed to our
God who is seated on his throne
and to the Lamb.’

And all the angels were standing round the throne and the Councillors and the four Creatures and they prostrated themselves on their faces. . . . Then one of the Councillors turned to me and said ‘who are these who are robed in white? and whence did they come?’

“‘My Lord,’ I answered, ‘it is you who know.’

“‘These,’ he said, ‘are they who came through the Great Persecution; they washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. And therefore it is that they are before the throne of God, and are serving him day and night in his Temple; and he who is seated on the throne will shelter them. Never again shall they be hungry, never again shall they be thirsty, nor shall the sun smite upon them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb that stands in the space before the throne will be their shepherd, and will lead them to life-giving springs of water; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.’”

There is certainly nothing here that is unworthy of the great Theme, and there are some flashes of light. On the whole, the translators have gone far toward accomplishing their announced purpose in this matter of style. They have made a long march toward the world’s way of speaking, while, for the most part, they are loyal to the uplift of their message. This is not to say that there are no criticisms, but rather that the task is large. There can be many failures and yet real success. As an example, we think there would be general condemnation of the word “discarnate” (2 Cor. v. 3). This is not modern in any sense. But, on the other hand, this is the most extreme case we have noted.

To turn now to such matters of translation as are apart from style, it is evident that here one faces an unlimited opportunity for difference and debate. What a battle-ground the Greek Testament has been! How many conflicts of great linguistic gladiators it has seen! It would be interesting to know the method by which these “twenty scholars, representing *the*¹ various sections of the Christian church,” adjusted all those historic difficulties over which the centuries have contended. The result, however, if we would be fair to it, must be estimated with a distinct appreciation of the aim as set forth by the translators. The book is not a revision, but a

¹ *Italics ours.*

translation *de novo*. It is not a paraphrase, it is yet more than a verbal translation; so the preface informs us. It is not easy to keep our stand on this delicate line of differentiation. We shall not always agree that a judicious attitude is maintained. In this connection it is worth while to enter a protest against the discontinuance of the marginal readings where there is real uncertainty. Every reader is entitled to a knowledge of the exact situation as it really exists; the less access he has to the original, and the more he is limited to "modern English," so much the more is he entitled to have the true possibilities of the case made clear to him. Marginal reference of other sorts may be useful; this is essential. Historically the difference regarding Paul's reference to his second visit to Corinth is important (2 Cor. xiii. 2), and should be made clear. Morally there is a difference between "adulterating" God's message and "making profit" (T. C.) out of it (2 Cor. ii. 17). And theologically, whatever section of the church we represent, it is cavalier to dismiss *δικαιόω* as "pronouncing righteous."

In the matter of translation, as of diction, the revised edition shows some conservative notes as compared with the tentative edition. To be *happy* was the reward pronounced by the beatitudes; it is now again to be *blessed*. An interesting change of mind appears also in 1 Tim. iii. 2, where the marital relations which befit the "Presiding Officer in the Church" have made a theme of such long and sharp difference. The exact translation would seem to be as the American Version renders, "The husband of one wife." The original "Twentieth Century" edition, however, said: "He should have been only once married." The final version now reacts so far that the requirement is simply that he shall be "a faithful husband."

The limits of this review must confine our attention to a few of the many interesting examples of translation. Some atten-

tion has been called previously to James i. 9, 10, where the American Version reads: "But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate, and the rich in that he is made low." The original edition of the "Twentieth Century" reads: "A Brother in lowly circumstances should be proud of his high position, but a rich Brother of the lowliness of his position." Behind this verse there is, of course, the primitive conception of the real and superior excellence of poverty. To the author of the Epistle as to St. Francis it was itself a nobility. It is easy to miss this. Weymouth does: "Let a brother in humble life rejoice *when* raised to a higher position." The "Twentieth Century Revised" reads now with more correctness: "Let a Brother in humble circumstances be proud of his exalted position, but a rich Brother of his humiliation." We venture an attempt ourselves: Let the lowly Brother exult in his high position, but the rich Brother only in being humbled.

There are of course passages on the other hand where we feel that the new translation has gone astray.

Take Heb. i. 7. Here, it seems to us, the canons of sense distinctly favor the American Version. The biblical writer is speaking of the graded glories of the celestial hierarchy. According to his felicitous quotation, angels are indeed as "winds," but to the Son is eternal rule. The original passage appears to be Ps. civ. 4. If, in the light of the Septuagint, either passage should be wrested from what is apparently its most natural meaning, it should be the original, but this is not at all necessary, for it is much more likely that the whole difficulty is due to a Septuagint mistranslation or indefiniteness which is carried over into the New Testament.

There are three passages of somewhat striking interest, as translations, to which we would refer. Two of them concern Matthew's account of Peter's confession; the other relates to

Paul's patient conformity to his harsh circumstances. In the first of these passages (Matt. xvi. 19) Jesus is made to say: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be held in Heaven to be forbidden, and whatever you allow on earth will be held in Heaven to be allowed." The interpretations of this passage have usually taken their point from the supposition that keys mean authority. Peter is therefore to initiate the methods, and decide the issues, of the kingdom, as this translation evidently makes him do. Logically this is inevitably the primacy of Peter. But what the "Twentieth Century" gives us is not really a translation: it is a bit of exegesis. And the exact translation which the American Revision gives us is open to quite another meaning. "Keys" signify not so much authority as confidence. Peter has shown himself a man of singular capacity of insight. He has seen things as they are. His eye has discovered Messiah. Such a man can be trusted alone. He may soon take the keys and go his own way. His deeds shall be in accord with the eternal facts toward which he has shown himself undeceived. His bindings and loosings shall be such as have the sanction of heaven. So does God ever reward the man of insight.

In the twenty-third verse we have Jesus again speaking to Peter: "Out of my way, Satan! . . . for you look at things not as God does, but as man does." This is striking; it is a truly great conception; but it is a question whether this can be considered a valid translation, unless it be as a paraphrase. Comparison with other passages (especially 1 Macc. x. 20) would seem to make it clear that Jesus said: "You do not side with God, but with men." From this point it is not a long step, to be sure, to the translation which the "Twentieth Century" proposes, but it is just this step which differentiates a translation and a paraphrase.

Once more: in Phil. iv. 12, 13, Paul speaks of his "independence of circumstances." He is made to say: "I know how to face humble circumstances, and I know how to face prosperity. Into all and every human experience I have been initiated—into plenty and hunger, into prosperity and want." What a splendid cosmopolitanism is suggested by the words "Into all and every human experience I have been initiated"! This is a largeness of life, a scope of horizon, worthy of a great man; but, after all, this translation is misleading. Really Paul is not referring to his range of experience as a *completed* one, as this translation would seem to indicate, but to the fact that he has found the secret which is at the *heart* of all experience. To him to be *initiated* meant exactly that—to get the secret; to us generally it has come to mean actually to *experience*. Now Paul had not actually known all and every human experience; he did not maintain that he had. That was not necessary nor important. He had found the secret which applied universally. Logically and grammatically this is evident. We must therefore make clear the particular phase of *μεμύημαι* which he is using. Can Lightfoot's suggestion be improved, "Of all and everything I possess the secret"? This seems to us exact.

There is at least one other important approach of criticism toward any biblical translation; it relates to historical settings and doctrinal suggestions which both consciously and unconsciously are given to the various books by the comments and the form of publication. The work which a translation does unconsciously is often the most far-reaching. We wish to emphasize the importance of these considerations. The partisans of a verbal inspiration are right in maintaining that their view has been shaken in the public confidence by no other argument so much as by the appearance of the Revised Version *in other words*. It called the attention of all patently to the fact that

no version was "authorized" by canons either of the human or the divine. How significant a step this new insight was in the swift forward movement of the last twenty years we have failed to appreciate. It was really a popular emancipation from that literalism which could hold its ground only where there was but one translation of the Bible. Yet this result was no purpose of the English revisers. In a like unconsciousness these recent translators are surely achieving.

For example, as concerns the historical setting and suggestion, the slightest comment is liable to be of lasting importance. How easy it was to insert Ussher's chronology into the Bible! What ages of explanation and contention before it could be withdrawn! What chronological misinterpretations have sprung from the fact that the Gospels come first, and the Revelation, with its final anathema against an added word, last! It becomes important therefore that one should speak only what is evidently true. It is better to say frankly, "The Gospel according to St. Mark," as does the "Twentieth Century," and take the consequent uncertainties as to exactly what that really means, than to say, "The Gospel News as Recorded by Matthew," with the more definite statement. It is better to say (T. C.), "A Letter to Christian People. (Known as the 'Second Letter of St. Peter')"

than to say, "The Second Epistle of Peter" (Am. Rev. Ver.). It is wise to make a certain reservation in the Pauline literature, to head it, "The Letters attributed to St. Paul," and this because, according to scholarship, these phrases give the truest description of the real critical situation.

It is interesting to notice the decision of the editors as regards the order of the books. In their own words, the order is "due to the desire not to inconvenience a reader, familiar with the old order, more than is necessary, but, at the same time,

to make an advance in the direction of such a chronological arrangement as modern research has rendered possible. Three main divisions have been adopted. Within these subdivisions the books and letters stand in a probable chronological arrangement." The three main divisions are: the Historical Books, the Letters, and the Apocalypse. Entirely apart from the special conclusions of the editors as to the difficult matter of the chronological order, it is well that the old order should disappear. We venture that, to many a lay reader, this rearrangement or any other will be the first suggestion of these interesting and important problems, and there is nothing which the biblical scholar needs more from the laity than some clear appreciation of the reality of the problems which he faces. He is not creating problems; they cannot be avoided; and this situation should be made clear. Inasmuch as the arrangement of the books will seem to have a certain measure of authority, it is worth while to transcribe the conclusions. They are in many respects quite at variance with those of other students. Some of them seem to us to be almost evidently wrong. But they are interesting. The books appear as follows:—

Mark	Ephesians
Matthew	Philippians
Luke	1 Timothy
John	2 Timothy
Acts	Titus
James	Hebrews
1 Thessalonians	1 Peter
2 Thessalonians	2 Peter
Galatians	Jude
1 Corinthians	1 John
2 Corinthians	2 John
Romans	3 John
Colossians	Revelation
Philemon	

As already stated, it does not seem to us that this order is

likely to maintain itself in the face of advancing investigation. It does seem to us that this rearrangement, together with the comments scattered along the way, will open to a largely increased number of people the reality and the range of some of the important questions of New Testament study, the answers to which will be greatly illuminating. If so, this will be a most important service, and of itself will be ample reward for all the toil.

There is at least one other great hope along the line of such a version as this. If it is realized, it, too, will be considerably by an unconscious process. We need nothing more sorely in our Christianity than that the line between the sacred and the secular should be erased. Religion, after all, is not other-worldliness or other-speech. All this breeds affectation and insincerity, and these, often in pious garb, are Christ's most accursed betrayers. The true campaigner for Jesus Christ is simply the true man making disclosure of his real self by his own honest speech. We can surely have large hope that a vernacular Bible may go far to hasten the day when the followers of Jesus shall understand that they do not *need* to adopt archaic phrases when they would speak of him, but that they may join themselves to the great "Campaign of Testimony" in as simple and natural a language as they use for all their daily realities. And this is no small thing. For thus the Kingdom comes.

It ought not any longer to be necessary to say that there is no final translation of the Bible. There is indeed no final translation for any class of people. The Bible is too large to be appreciated and expressed by any one man or any group of men. As translators, and indeed as historical students, we shall have our individual points of view. No one can expect universal approval; in many respects he must learn only to welcome

strong opposition and criticism. But beyond the opposition is the common aim. We are workers together in the great enterprise. To get the essential messages of the Bible into the consciousness of the lowest as of the highest, of the ignorant as of the learned,—this is the campaign of Christianity. In that service there is surely ennoblement for all who share it. Let us reverently thank God that in our day there are so many who have committed themselves to this high task. In their increasing numbers and their devoted earnestness there is hope that the Gospel is to have a new swiftness and a more convincing power.