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THE WAY OF THE TRANSLATORS.

HOW OUR BIBLE WAS TRANSMITTED.

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LAST year the British and Foreign Bible Society celebrated the achievement of its seven hundredth language—a wonderful record. Approximately once a month, now, portions of the Bible in new tongues and dialects are being sent out, and the world's interest in the Scriptures is stronger than ever before. And in England itself the Bible has found an immovable home in the hearts and souls of many generations of men and women. We can trace its influence in our everyday speech, so that even the inaccurate phrase "straining at a gnat"—which should read "straining out a gnat"—has become one of our common expressions. An English traveller of the eighteenth century tells in his diaries how the country lads of the South would tell one another the gallant histories of Joseph and David and Gideon to while away the time, and it is with that spirit that the Church of England has grown up, living with and guided by the Book.

Now we have seen the fourth centenary of the death of Tindale. Very soon other notable centenaries will be upon us. And at this time it is of real interest to us to follow the long road which the Scriptures have travelled in their transmission since those days in the dim past when their writers first put pen to paper.

Picture first the scene when, say, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians was written. We can visualise the aged toil-scarred missionary a prisoner in his hired house in Rome, chained by the wrist to a stolid member of the Imperial Guard. There is a little group of friends around him. He is dictating, because he can no longer see clearly enough to write legibly. Timothy, his secretary, jots down the Greek words with quick strokes of his reed pen.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

The gracious sentences are written rapidly in black sticky ink—ink made of soot and gum—on the long roll of brownish papyrus. The letter is being written on a paper imported from Egypt, made from cross layers of the pith of the papyrus reed which grew by the Nile, glued together, pressed, dried, and polished to give a writing surface. Epaphroditus, lately risen from his sick bed, stands by, waiting for the roll to be completed. Several feet in length it is, but not as bulky as the long thirty-foot rolls on which the evangelists jotted their gospel stories. The last words are written, and Epaphroditus begins his long journey down the Appian Way to the port of Puteoli. And so at last the little roll comes safely over the sea and is delivered to the heads of the young Christian Church at Philippi. We may imagine how reverently that fragile roll of

thin brown paper was cherished, to be read and re-read by the brethren on the Lord's Day.

None of the autograph writings of the apostles now remain—papyrus was no stronger than our ordinary writing-paper and it perished easily. Jerome tells us how after only one century the papyri of the library of Cæsarea began to crumble to dust and had to be copied on parchment by the presbyters in charge.

Nevertheless, here and there in the dry dust heaps of Egypt, and among the tombs of the dead, we still recover ancient fragments of the Scriptures, copied by some forgotten scribe within a few years of the penning of the original manuscripts. Quite recently, for instance, among the papyri of the John Rylands Library in Manchester there has been found a fragment of St. John's Gospel, copied in Egypt during the first half of the second century—an interesting confirmation of the early date of St. John's Gospel.

Even more interesting, perhaps, was the discovery in the same library only a few weeks ago of some tattered scraps of the Greek text of Deuteronomy. These fragments are some three hundred years older than any other manuscript of the Bible which we now possess.

About the third century B.C., the Jews of Alexandria set to work to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into their own tongue—Greek, then the universal language of civilisation, spoken in every city of the Mediterranean sea coast. Seventy scholars are said to have done this work, known hence as the Septuagint.

It is an ancient copy of this version which was lately discovered in Manchester, put to a strange use. It had formed part of the cartonnage covering for an Egyptian mummy. Pages of papyrus were glued together to make a sort of papier-maché. Then the whole was covered with plaster and painted. When this conglomeration had been soaked apart, it was discovered that it consisted of torn fragments of writing—part of the Book of Deuteronomy, and a scrap of Homer's Iliad. Surely a fascinating discovery for lovers of the Bible!

Centuries pass, and the language of the world changes from Greek to Latin. The need is felt for an authoritative Latin version of the Scriptures. And so the next version we find is the Vulgate, the standard text of the Roman Church.

This is the work of that devout if vitriolic-tongued scholar, Jerome. For many years he laboured as a hermit in a cave at Bethlehem, and few were as well fitted as he to undertake the task. He translated the New Testament from the Greek and the Old Testament from the original, learning Hebrew for the purpose.

"What labours," he writes, "did I undertake in learning that alphabet and those hard words! What difficulties I undertook. How often I despaired. How often I gave it up and set to my task once again, let my conscience bear witness. Yet, thanks be to God, now I pluck sweet fruit of that bitter tree." His whole work was completed about A.D. 400.

But even Latin did not long remain a universal language, and

soon on the Continent of Europe, as in our own land, the demand grew for the Scriptures in the vernacular. As far back as A.D. 350 a Gothic version was made by Ulfilas, bishop of the Goths. Some of this remains, beautifully inscribed on purple parchment in letters of silver—the first version in a Teutonic tongue, and a distant relative of our own English Bible.

Now we come nearer to home. The first name we meet is Cædmon, the poor cow-herd of Whitby, who was inspired in a vision to sing the stories of the Bible. These metrical paraphrases were made from translations prepared by his more literate if less gifted brethren, and told to him in order that he might turn them into verse.

Of course Cædmon's poems do not rank as translations, yet we remember his name with honour as one who first brought the Scriptures into the homes of the people.

Other figures pass by through the centuries. Aldhelm and Guthlac who prepared Saxon psalters. The Venerable Bede who died in 735, completing with his last breath a translation of St. John's Gospel. Alcuin, the schoolmaster of York. King Alfred who began his laws with a Saxon version of the Decalogue. Aldred of Holy Island who added the text in Northumbrian dialect between the lines of the famous Lindisfarne gospels. Many others whose names are forgotten and works lost.

Centuries pass by. England has lost the day at Hastings. The Saxon tongue has mingled with the Norman-French of the conquerors, and a new language, English, is born.

It was a long process. Not until three centuries after the Conquest was it proved by Chaucer that this sturdy composite Saxon-Norman vernacular had become a literary vehicle, and that it was capable of being moulded into verse and prose as strong and graceful as that of Petrarch and Bocaccio.

The day had now passed when England was content to be a bi-lingual country, satisfied on one hand with the Vulgate and Norman translations of the Bible, and on the other hand with fragments of archaic Saxon versions handed down for centuries through the lower classes. The stage was set for a fresh version of the Scriptures in our newly emancipated English tongue.

The first to provide a complete version of the Bible in this developed language was Wiclif, the fiery rector of Lutterworth. He was a strong opponent of the corrupt practices and superstitions which were choking the vitality out of the English Church, and he believed rightly that the cure lay in the open study of the Scriptures. For that purpose he gathered around him a band of collaborators, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the whole work completed two years before his death in 1382. His work is still intelligible to us, and many of the famous biblical phrases which originated in Wiclif's version still survive—e.g., " the beame and the mote," " the depe thingis of God."

Here is a fragment from chapter lx. of Isaiah (verse 10, onwards), to show how closely the English of Wiclif approximates to our

present-day language. Apart from the unfamiliar spelling, it is practically all intelligible to the modern reader.

" And the sones of pilgrymes schulen bilde thi wallis, and the Kingis of hem schulen mynystre to thee. For Y smoot thee in myn indignacioun, and in my recounselyng Y hadde merci on thee. And thi gatis schulen be openyd contynueli, day and nigt tho schulen not be closid ; that the strengthe of hethene men be brougt to thee, and the Kyngis of hem be brougt. For whi the folk and rewme that serveth not thee, schal perische, and hethene men schulen be distried bi wildirnesse. The glorie of the Liban schal come to thee, a fir tre and box tre, and pyne appil tre togidere, to onour the place of myn halewyng."

Another hundred and fifty years passed, and a revolution in literature had come about. The art of printing had been invented by Gutenberg before 1450, and books began to pour from the presses at a price which brought them within the reach of most people. It was no longer necessary to pay a sum equivalent to £40 in our money for a Bible, which was the cost of production of a manuscript copy of Wiclif's version. In England Caxton set up his movable type and produced beautiful work on the pattern of the classical handwriting of the scribes. The year 1483 saw his edition of the Golden Legend, a masterpiece of lay-out, illustrated with charming woodcuts, and interesting to us as being a free adaptation of the Bible story, combined with a literal translation of a good deal of the Latin Vulgate.

The means now were available for a popular translation of the Scriptures. The opportunity was seized by William Tindale, whose life-story is an epic of heroism and scholarship.

In 1523 this young scholar made his way into the palace of Tunstall, Bishop of London, fired with the hope of securing the Bishop's patronage in his project of translating the Scriptures. He had been at Oxford and Cambridge, where he had imbibed the traditions of Erasmus, and had gained a high reputation as a notable Greek and Hebrew scholar. Surely, he felt, the Bishop, who is reputed as a patron of the New Learning, will not fail to assist me in this ambition !

But Tindale had not taken into account the conservatism of the Church. Nor had he reckoned with the caution which its leaders showed for anything which might foster the unsettlement of religious thought which was coming over Europe with the revival of learning. And so he was disappointed with his reception, and went away having learnt from the Bishop himself that his house was full and that he had better seek a service in London.

Months passed by. Tindale succeeded in securing a place as curate at St. Dunstan's in the West in Fleet Street, but he found no possibility of undertaking his life work. To quote his own words: " So in London I abode almost one year, . . . and understood at the last, not only that there was no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England."

So next year Tindale sought refuge in Hamburg, where he com-

pleted his translation of the New Testament and in 1525 began the work of printing it at the presses of Peter Quentell at Cologne.

Even here Tindale was not left in peace, and shortly we see him snatching up from the presses the sheets of his uncompleted quarto edition and fleeing to Worms, the Lutheran stronghold. Here the New Testament was completed and began to be smuggled in great quantities into England. In the financing of this, curiously enough, Tindale was greatly aided by the action of Tunstall, Bishop of London, who bought up every copy he could get in order to burn them. The go-between for both parties was one Packington, a London merchant trading with Antwerp.

" Augustine Packington came to William Tindale and said, ' William, I know thou art a poor man, and hast a heap of New Testaments and books by thee, for the which thou hast both endangered thy friends and beggared thyself; and I have now gotten thee a merchant which with ready money shall despatch thee of all that thou hast, if you think it so profitable for yourself.' ' Who is the merchant ? ' said Tindale. ' The Bishop of London,' said Packington. ' Oh, that is because he will burn them,' said Tindale. ' Yea, marry,' quoth Packington. ' I am the gladder,' said Tindale, ' for these two benefits shall come thereof: I shall get money to bring myself out of debt, and the whole world will cry out against the burning of God's Word, and the overplus of the money that shall remain to me shall make me more studious to correct the said New Testament, and so newly to imprint the same once again, and I trust the second will much better like you than ever did the first.' And so forward went the bargain; the Bishop had the books; Packington had the thanks; and Tindale had the money."

Before his martyrdom on the 6th of October, 1536, Tindale completed the Pentateuch, Jonah, and probably also the version of the books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles which appears in Matthew's Bible of 1537. His work is the basis of all the translations since, a wonderful piece of scholarship founded upon the original Greek and Hebrew text.

By this time in England the clamour for the Scriptures had become insistent, and in 1535 a version appeared prepared by Miles Coverdale, later Bishop of Exeter. It had no great claims to originality, being a revision of Tindale's work, with the books untranslated by him taken from the German and Latin. Originally dedicated to Queen Anne Boleyn, it gained free and untrammelled circulation, though not actually the Royal licence. It is interesting that some editions have changed the dedication " Ane " to " JAne," and even have left the space for the Queen's name blank—a significant commentary on Henry's matrimonial affairs! This is the Bible known as the " Treacle Bible " from its translation of Jeremiah viii. 22: " Is there no triacle in Gilead ? "

Two years later was the first licensed Bible—Matthew's version of Tindale. It was strongly supported by Cranmer, but for all that it is hard to see how it got the royal consent, being so closely related to Tindale's forbidden version. Certainly it was an answer to Tindale's prayer at the stake only a year before—" Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

It now was felt necessary to produce an official English transla-

tion. And so in April, 1539, appeared the " Great Bible," much the same time as Taverner's hasty version.

This " Great Bible " was a sumptuous edition, prepared by Coverdale with the official sanction of the Church, prefaced by Cranmer and provided with a magnificent if crowded title-page by Hans Holbein the Court artist, in which Henry VIII was depicted delivering copies to his peers, lay and spiritual, and saying, " I make a decree that in all my Kingdom men shall tremble and fear before the Living God." And in order that it might gain wide circulation it was ordained that every clergyman should provide " one boke of the whole Bible of the largest volume in Englysshe, and have the same set up in summe convenient place within the church that he has cure of, whereat his parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and rede yt."

Some of this edition still survives in our Prayer Book version of the Psalms, and in the Sentences and Comfortable Words in the Communion Service.

It was a posthumous triumph for Tindale that only three years after his death this text should receive the full sanction of the Church and Crown, although in fact it followed closely his own version of 1534. Perhaps the most ironical triumph of all is the note that " it was oversene and perused at the comandement of the King's Highness by the ryghte reverende father in God, Cuthbert bishop of Duresme "—none other than Tunstall who a few years before had occupied himself so vigorously in burning almost the same words !

A gap of twenty years follows, during part of which the fires blazed at Smithfield and the reformers fled from the Marian persecution. Then with the restoration of the Protestant Church came the celebrated Genevan Bible in 1560—sometimes known as the Breeches Bible, in which Adam and Eve were described as having sewed " fig-tree leaves together and made themselves breeches " (Gen. iii. 7).

Only one Bible comes now before our Authorised Version of 1611—" The Bishop's Bible " of 1568—a luxurious production which cost about £16 of our money in the large edition. But it never became popular or widely read despite an order in Convocation that " every archbishop and bishop should have at his house a copy of the holy Bible of the largest volume, as lately published at London, and that it should be placed in the hall or large dining-room, that it might be useful to their servants or to strangers."

And so we arrive at the opening of the seventeenth century. James I had come to the throne, and the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 was held to try to find some common ground between the Puritan and the High Church parties.

Though little real agreement was reached one result was achieved —perhaps the most important that could have been gained. The making of an entirely new translation was set on foot.

The experts of England set to work with a real feeling for the importance of their task. Forty-seven of the greatest scholars of all creeds met together, setting aside their differences to arrive at

the best possible translation. It was agreed that all notes—the controversial nature of which had marred all the previous translations—should be omitted, except for those necessary in cases of textual doubt and for cross-reference.

"Marry, withal he gave this caveat, that no marginal notes should be added, having found in them which are annexed to the Geneva translation some notes very partial untrue seditious and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits. As for example, the first chapter of Exodus and the Nineteenth verse, where the marginal note alloweth disobedience unto Kings."

If it had been for this alone, the Authorised Version would have been worth while. Obviously it was impossible to get universal assent to an edition heavily loaded with highly controversial party footnotes—many of which seem to us almost to be more actuated by malice than by scholarship. This was the case in all the English versions up to date. Some of Tindale's notes are particularly caustic. Thus, on Exodus xxxii. 35, he writes: "The Pope's bull slayeth more than Aaron's calf"—hardly a justifiable comment on the context! And in the new version too, the most up-to-date modern knowledge of the time was used. The oldest available Hebrew and Greek manuscripts were studied afresh in the light of the best European commentaries. Altogether the work took no less than three years, and the final result of 1611 was a masterpiece that gained a firm hold on the affections of the English people. Indeed few will fail to agree that the translation was a real miracle inspired by the Holy Spirit when they contrast the simple and lucid, yet strangely beautiful flow of language, with the florid and overweighted prose which was in fashion at the beginning of the seventeenth century. A notably bad example of this latter is to be seen in the interminable sentences of the 1611 prologue to the reader, now rarely printed.

Here is a portion of one of these cumbrous sentences—its total span is no less than 263 words.

". . . and fourthly that he was no babe, but a great clerk that gave forth (and in writing to remain to posterity) in passion peradventure, but yet he gave forth, that he had not seen any profit to come by any synod or meeting of the clergie, but rather the contrary: and lastly against church-maintenance and allowance, in such sort, as the ambassadours and messengers of the great King of kings should be furnished, it is not unknown what a fiction or fable (so it is esteemed, and for no better by the reporter himself, though superstitious) was devised: namely that in such time as the professours and teachers of Christianity in the Church of Rome, then a true church, were liberally endowed, a voice forsooth was heard from heaven, saying, Now is poyson poured down into the church, etc."

To understand the miracle of the Authorised Version it is worth remembering that this was the sort of prose in fashion and considered stylish at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is the kind of writing which makes even the invaluable Hooker so difficult. Indeed it was not until the time of Steele and Addison that literary style became simple and lucid—and probably this change was a result of the crystal-clear style of King James's Bible itself.

Probably the explanation of the beautifully simple style of this book really may be found in the fact that Tindale's blunt matter-of-fact English lies behind it, setting the pattern to all subsequent translators.

The debt that we owe to the great old pioneer is obvious from this example, taken at random from the eighth chapter of St. Matthew:

"When Jesus was come downe from the mountayne/moche people folowed him. And lo/there cā a lepre/and worsheped him saynge: master/if thou wylt/Thou canst make me clene. He putt forthe his hond and tewched him saynge: I wyll/be clene/and imediatly hys leprosy was clēsed. And Jesus said unto him. Se thou tell no man/but go and shewe thy self to the preste and offer the gyfte/that moses comaunded to be offred in witnes to them."

By sheer merit the Authorised Version won the day, despite a profusion of blunders and misprints produced by the underpaid labour which various firms of printers employed. Two notorious mistakes out of many were that in the "Vinegar Bible" of 1717, where chapter xx. of St. Luke is headed "The Parable of the Vinegar," and that in "the Wicked Bible" of 1632, where the "not" was omitted from the seventh commandment. Nearly all of this edition of a thousand was suppressed, and the publishers suffered a fine of £300.

If the sixteenth century was the peak period of the English translators, the centuries which followed marked the discoveries of the most valuable original manuscripts. Thus, King James's band of translators possessed none of the three great uncial manuscripts which form the basis of modern English versions—the Alexandrian, presented to Charles I by the Patriarch of Constantinople, seventeen years too late to be of use in preparing the Authorised Version; the great Vatican manuscript; and the Sinaiticus, rescued by Tischendorf in 1859, and recently acquired by the British people.

And so in the interests of accuracy another version became necessary, supplied when in 1885 the complete Revised Version was issued to the public.

It is perhaps still too early to be dogmatic about the value of this last version. The Old Testament is undoubtedly far superior to the 1611 Edition. The essential poetic nature of many of the books is made clear, and whole passages of works like Job, which were entirely unintelligible in the old translation, have been revealed in their original sense. The New Testament is perhaps more open to criticism. While undoubtedly many valuable textual corrections have been made, here and there the Committee seems to have forgotten that it had been asked to follow the Authorised Version whenever possible. A good many changes have been made even in the most familiar and best-loved passages, without any corresponding increase of accuracy having resulted. Occasionally the revision has only succeeded in obscuring and weakening the sense. Compare the clear resonance of the Authorised Version in St. John's "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"—with the almost ambiguous and certainly unmusical effect produced by

the Revised Version when it substitutes "fearful" for "afraid"—a change without any apparently good reason.

The end of the story of the Bible has not yet been reached. The twentieth century has brought with every year contributions to our knowledge of the original texts and an understanding of the Common Greek of the first century. The legacy of the sands of Egypt is not yet exhausted, and daily new light is being thrown upon the Scriptures. As it has turned out, 1885 was much too early for a final revision. Probably the time will soon be ripe for a thorough re-revision, at any rate of the New Testament.

What form will that take? On the whole, perhaps it will be wiser to keep to the now ageless style of the Authorised Version. Some brilliant translations in our twentieth-century speech do exist, but one suspects that in them there is the inherent defect of a style which will not live. Dr. James Moffatt's Bible is invaluable to us to-day, but who can say that in a century it may not appear more archaic even than a corrected version of the Authorised Version would be?

We are all familiar with the quaint old phrasing of the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis xxv.): "And Jacob sod pottage . . . and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint."

A century from now Christian folk may still read it with, at least, affectionate tolerance.

But what of—"One day Jacob was cooking some food . . . and Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me have a bite of that red omelet there! I am famishing.'"

May that too not seem out of date and strange, but without the glamour and prestige of the words which in 2036 would have been hallowed by 425 years of diligent reading by some score of generations?

It is not the aim of the writer to carp at Dr. Moffatt's translation, or at any of the very effective modern ones—they are more than useful to us to-day as commentaries. But for everyday and for liturgical use the writer makes this plea—when the time for yet another English Bible comes, may its construction follow the principles of the 1885 Committee, so that it will be a revision of our traditional English Bible rather than an entirely new and up-to-the-minute translation.

WHAT IS LIFE? By W. J. Still. *Thynne & Co., Ltd.* 3s. 6d.

This book aims at presenting in a popular fashion facts and observations which will help the ordinary reader to maintain his belief in the Bible and his conviction that God is working His purpose out in the world which He has made. It is well printed; contains some illustrative charts, and a Bibliography of modern books.

H. D.