# Editorial

THE reception accorded to the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible[1], which was published simultaneously in this country and in the U.S.A. on September 30, must have afforded a good deal of satisfaction to the group of scholars who for the past fifteen years have been occupied with this notable undertaking. From a publishing point of view alone the task accomplished is a monumental one. It involved a first printing of almost a million copies, using more than a thousand tons of paper and two thousand gallons of ink! The book is certainly a very fine production, printed in a clear and legible type-face, with the prose text logically paragraphed and the poetic passages set in verse form.

The aim of this new version of the Holy Scriptures is clearly stated in the preface. "The Revised Standard Version is not a new translation in the language of to-day. It is not a paraphrase which aims at striking idioms. It is a revision which seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used through the years. It is intended for use in public and private worship, not merely for reading and instruction. We have resisted the temptation to use phrases that are merely current usage, and have sought to put the message of the Bible in simple, enduring words that are worthy to stand in the great Tyndale-King James tradition."

That this aim has been worthily and successfully carried out can scarcely be denied. Moreover, that a revision of this kind meets a very definite need at the present time must be apparent to all who are not blinded by a superstitious and jealous regard for the Authorized Version. The defects of the latter arise in part from the fact that it is based upon a faulty Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek text; in part from the use of English words which no longer convey the same sense as they did in 1611; and in part from actual mistranslations which are disturbingly evident, especially in the New Testament. Many of these faults were of course corrected in the English Revised Version of 1881 and 1885, and the American Standard Version of 1901; but it is generally agreed that those versions, for all their excellence as literal, word-for-word translations, lack the literary charm of the earlier version and for that reason have never possessed the same popular appeal.

Thus it was that in 1937 the International Council of Religious Education in the U.S.A. authorized a new revision of the Bible which should "embody the best results of modern scholarship as to the meaning of the Scriptures, and express this meaning in English diction which is designed for use in public and private worship and preserves those qualities which have given to the King James Version a supreme place in English literature." The result is the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible. Thirty-two scholars have served as members of the Committee charged with making the revision, and

[1] Published by Nelson, cloth 30/-; rexine 37/6.

they have had the assistance of an advisory board of fifty representatives of the co-operating denominations. Although the revision is the work of American scholars, it contains few, if any, Americanisms. There is certainly no reason why the American origin of the R.S.V. should prejudice the British reader against it, particularly when it is remembered that several American scholars actively collaborated in the preparation of our Revised Version in 1885.

Indeed, it is somewhat strange that whereas in this country the R.S.V. has been welcomed by Christian people of all shades of opinion —including the most conservative scholars—in the U.S.A. itself a bitter onslaught has been made upon it by a small but vociferous fundamentalist group, led by Prof. Oswald T. Allis. It is perfectly apparent that the real reason why these folk object to the new version is because it has been made—so they allege—by " modernists " ; and for this reason they are instinctively prejudiced against it and conceive it to be their bounden duty to expose its blemishes and inaccuracies. It is almost pathetic to note the desperate straits to which they are reduced in order to bolster up their case.

For instance, Dr. Allis finds fault with the R.S.V. on the score of punctuation. It does not employ so many commas or colons as the A.V. He objects to the omission of the italics employed by the A.V. and R.V. to distinguish those words not actually in the biblical text. He is gravely disturbed by the dropping of the second person singular (" thou ", etc., except in words addressed to God the Father), and affirms that to address Jesus as " you " is to obscure His Diety. Dr. Allis is also disturbed by the use of inverted commas to indicate direct speech, more especially as in the Fourth Gospel it is not always clear where the words of our Lord end and the comment of the evangelist begins. Then there is the paragraphing, which is another cause for complaint. The R.S.V. actually dares to divide the parable of the Prodigal Son into *two* paragraphs instead of treating it as a single paragraph ; while Stephen's speech in Acts vii is divided into five paragraphs instead of being treated as a unit. " Such divisions," Dr. Allis solemnly assures us, " break the connection to some extent ". There is also the question of " accuracy "—by which Dr. Allis apparently means a slavish adherance to the order of the words in the Greek text. As an example of inaccuracy, he quotes the R.S.V. of St. John i. 43f., " The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said . . ." The word order here is different from the more literal rendering of the R.V. : " On the morrow he was minded . . . and he findeth . . . and Jesus saith . . ." Because the revisers have transposed the order of the name ' Jesus ' they are accused of ignoring the findings of textual criticism, and their work is condemned as an " idiomatic " rendering instead of being a scholarly and accurate translation.

All this sort of thing will strike the ordinary intelligent Englishman as the most pathetic and pitiable nonsense. This is fundamentalism at its worst—obscurantism run riot. Such criticism will scarcely affect the circulation of the R.S.V. in this country, though no doubt it will stir up a lot of heated controversy among certain sections of the religious public in the U.S.A. One thing Dr. Allis's articles do

make clear, and that is why certain brands of American evangelicalism are regarded with more than a little suspicion by loyal evangelicals in this land and on the continent of Europe.

. . . . .

The note of authentic evangelical Christianity is certainly not missing from Canon Wedel's masterly book entitled *The Christianity of Main Street.*[1] By the Christianity of Main Street Canon Wedel means the popular religion of the day—that " illiterate Christianity " which is based on sentiment rather than on scripture and which bears only the vaguest resemblance to the dynamic and dogmatic faith of the New Testament.

Although Canon Wedel, who is Warden of the College of Preachers, Washington, writes in particular of the American scene, his searching analysis of current religious opinions applies just as much to our own country. Among us too there is only too evident " a Christianity without doctrinal foundations, or one resting on such shallow foundations as to endanger the superstructure. The very word ' theology ' —which simply means knowledge of God—has become suspect. The Christianity of Main Street has, in fact, become a kind of Christianity *without* theology, one which does not repudiate the name of God, but which has basically little to do with Him. Man and not God has become the chief actor in the drama of moral progress. Moralism has replaced revelation as the key to Christianity's meaning ".

The only solution to a situation of this kind, as Canon Wedel makes so clear, is a return to the " classical Christianity " of the Bible and the creeds, centred in the divine person of the Redeemer and involving active membership in His Church. And this presents to the clergy, in particular, a challenge to devote themselves with renewed vigour to the teaching ministry, so that their people may be instructed in the faith of the gospel. In no other way will the Church in our day recover its strength, maintain its witness, and propagate its message in a growingly hostile world.

[1] Macmillan, 7/6.

# Writers in this Issue

THE REV. G. W. H. LAMPE is a Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and Edward Cadbury Professor Elect in the University of Birmingham.

THE REV. R. F. HETTLINGER is Professor of Theology in Wycliffe College, Toronto.

THE REV. R. E. REEVE is vicar of New Hythe, near Maidstone.

THE REV. J. W. ROXBURGH is vicar of St. Matthew's, Bootle, Liverpool.

THE REV. F. J. TAYLOR is vicar of Christ Church, Claughton, Birkenhead.