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INSPIRED TRANSLATIONS

WHEN the English Revised New Testament appeared, it met a strenuous critic in Dean Burgon. He mentioned their rule, "To introduce as few alterations as possible into the text of the Authorized Version, consistently with faithfulness". Among numerous particulars he quotes 2 Peter i. 5-7, "And beside all this—add to your faith virtue," etc. He notes here thirty variations from the A.V., in his opinion every one a change for the worse. Afterwards came the American Standard Revision, differing from the English in multitudes of places. Ever since, the Revised Version has been a house divided against itself, the American form having no circulation in British territory, or the English Revision in the U.S.A. Meanwhile, the A.V. increases, uniform throughout the world, attaining a circulation greater than any other version, in any language, ancient or modern. Such discussions may interest the millions who read English. But they do not affect the doctrine of inspired Scripture, errorless as it came from God, for our translators, like the early copyists, so indispensable and invaluable, were not infallible or inspired.

Yet there are inspired translations in the Greek New Testament. Our Lord spoke Syriac and possibly Greek. The Apostles could write and speak two languages. Many of his sayings accordingly were probably translated from Syriac into Greek. Scores of quotations, sometimes whole paragraphs from the Old Testament, are in the N.T., and what are these but translations from the Hebrew? In a discussion of the Septuagint, Davis' *Bible Dictionary* (p. 799) states that there are about 350 quotations from the O.T. in the gospels, the Acts and the epistles, and only about fifty differ virtually from the Greek version. And in apostolic times the LXX may have been the most effective version to use. Nowhere in the N.T. is it said that this or that translation is perfect; but the statements based on the translation are infallible.

A glance at the catalogue of these quotations reveals their immense importance. A council was called to debate the plans, the nature itself of the Christian Church. Paul, Barnabas and Peter related facts as to the evangelization of Gentiles. That work would be forever hindered if Christianity were to be merely a form of Judaism, and its growth would have been impossible. Finally James quoted an O.T. prophecy. Thereupon the council announced its conclusions, evident to this day, especially in Christian missions.

No one can measure the benefits of the Reformation. Its great theme was justification by faith. Paul argues about it, and quotes the O.T. Another theme of the Reformation was the priesthood of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates the pre-eminence of the Mediator, by references to Melchizedek, in Genesis and the 110th Psalm. And this Epistle quotes a paragraph from Jeremiah about the new covenant. Peter's sermon interprets the Day of Pentecost, and is full of O.T. quotations, including one from the 16th Psalm. This same psalm is quoted by Paul, in a gospel sermon. We may contemplate a "gospel hardening" in three aspects. In Isaiah vi. 9, 10 there is the ministerial agency of the prophet, "make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy", etc. Then there is the guilty agency of the people, as quoted in Matthew xiii. 14, 15 and Acts xxviii. 26-7, "Their eyes have they closed". Finally, God's judicial sentence, as quoted in John xii. 40, "He hath blinded their eyes".

Our modern life sometimes impairs the nervous system, and worry is said to kill more than work. A peaceful mind is a cure, assisted by an O.T. promise, quoted in Hebrews xiii. 5, "he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". Here we may pause and consider some English translation. In Greek, a negative can be strengthened by another negative, while an old rule in English was that two negatives make an affirmative. Yet three negatives in Mark v. 3 do not prevent three negatives in English, "and no man could bind him, no, not with chains". But in Hebrews xiii. 5 are five negatives. How can the English language accommodate so many? We turn to the hymnal for five negatives: "That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

So these O.T. quotations have great theological importance. And how about the process of translation?

The query is proper, though a paradox, how can anything be translated? Hebrew and Greek have their own peculiarities, idioms and synonyms. An idea taken from one language is stated in the words of another language, and subject to its limitations. The verb "to have" is in Greek, but not in Hebrew. Prof. A. T. Robertson says, in the *Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 161, "The Greek conditional sentence is one of the crowning triumphs of syntax. No other language has surpassed it in accuracy of expression". There are differences in tenses, Hebrew and Greek. An idea certainly is transferred from one language to another, but some grammatical minutiae can never be transferred. Hebrew verbs have some feminine forms, lacking in Greek. Here is a field for commentators and grammarians. Paul quotes Isaiah liv. 1 in Galatians iv. 27; but the prophet uses feminine forms in some verbs, which cannot be transferred to the Greek. The sovereign majesty of divine inspiration is untrammelled by artificial rules of modern or modernist critics. N.T. writers have an inspired purpose, and use whatever suits that purpose, emphasis, idiom or synonym. Inspiration leaves the personal characteristics of the writers unchanged; Paul, Peter, James or John has each his own style. These quotations add proofs that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is laid open in the New.

It may be an advantage to have a closer look at details of these translations. In the transition, sometimes Hebrew words are omitted, and sometimes the order of O.T. clauses is inverted in the N.T. As to tenses, the Hebrew perfect may be rendered, Ps. cxviii. 22, by a participle, Acts iv. 11, or by an aorist indicative, Matthew xxi. 42 (see also, Ps. ii. 1, Acts iv. 25); or by a Greek perfect, Ps. ii. 7, Acts xiii. 33; or by a future, Exod. xxxiii. 19, Rom. ix. 15. The Hebrew imperfect, by a present, Isa. liii. 7, Acts viii. 32; by a future, Isa. xi. 10, Rom. xv. 12; and by an aorist, Acts ii. 28, Ps. xvi. 11. The Hebrew participle, Hab. i. 5, Acts xiii. 41, by a present; a participle, Isa. xi. 10, Rom. xv. 12; present indicative Ps. xcv. 10, Heb. iii. 10; by a perfect, Ps. xl. 7, Heb. x. 7. As to emphasis, pronouns are emphatic in both Hebrew and Greek, Ps. cii. 26, Heb. i. 11; emphatic in Greek only, not Hebrew, 2 Sam. xxii. 3, Heb. ii. 13; and likewise, Ps. cii. 25, Heb. i. 10. And a Hebrew negative may be represented by an emphatic Greek one, Jer. xxxi. 34, Heb. viii. 11, 12, also, Ps. xxxii. 2, Rom. iv. 8.

The synonyms, Hebrew and Greek, are interesting. In Hebrew there are several words for "man", sometimes translated in the A.V., sometimes not. Two of these are contrasted in Psalm lxii. 9, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie". Apply these same renderings to these same words in Proverbs viii. 4, where wisdom calls, "Unto you, O men (of high degree), I call; and my voice is to the sons of man (of low degree)." That is, wisdom calls to all classes, high and low. Again, there is another Hebrew word for man translated in Job iv. 17, "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" And two texts may be illuminated by applying this rendering to this same word, Ps. ix. 20, "Put them in fear, O Lord; that the nations may know themselves to be but (mortal) men"; and Isa. li. 12, "who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a (mortal) man that shall die, and of the son of man (of low degree) which shall be made as grass?" So, too, Psalm viii. 4, "What is (mortal) man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man (of low degree), that thou visitest him?" And in Greek there are two words for man, one more general, the other more respectful, which Paul used in beginning his speech on Mars' Hill, "Ye men (or, as Dr. Alexander suggests, gentlemen) of Athens". In Psalm xxxii. 2 we have, "Blessed is the man (of low degree) unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity"; and as quoted, Rom. iv. 8, the more respectful term is used, "Blessed is the (gentleman) to whom", etc. And where Psalm viii. 4 is quoted, in Hebrews ii. 6, the Greek term for ordinary man, the general term, is repeated in both clauses.

In his useful book on N.T. Synonyms, Archbishop Trench mentions two Greek words for "new". One is, the new, "as that which has recently come into existence". So, in Hebrews xii. 24, Jesus is "the mediator of the new covenant", one that contrasts with that of Moses, nearly two thousand years before. But the other word, the new in quality, contrasted with that which shows signs of dissolution, is appropriately used, quoting Jeremiah xxxi. 31, in Hebrews viii. 13, "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

Commenting on Romans iii. 4, Dr. Charles Hodge says, "The sacred writers of the New Testament often depart from the words of the Old Testament in their citations, being careful only to give the mind of the Spirit". On this passage, Calvin's

remark is characteristic, repeated substantially in other places, "We indeed know that the Apostles in quoting Scripture often used a freer language than the original; for they counted it enough to quote what was suitable to their subject: hence they made no great account of words".

Quoting Psalm lxxxii. 6 in John x. 34-36, Jesus said, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" Of course, he employs a translation; and even so, as he said, "The Scripture cannot be broken". And we do well to emphasize what he said.

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