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Is the Revised Version a Failure?

I.

By the Rev. J. F. B. TINLING, B.A., Crouch End, London.

My impression is that the work has not taken any general hold of the Bible-reading public. I am a good deal away from home on mission, deputation, and other service, and I have not found the new version superseding the old in any considerable number of instances, either in the pulpit or in the home. I would not speak confidently, but I seem to meet with it less frequently than I did a few years ago.

As to my own opinion of its value, I will only venture to say of the Old Testament translation that I regard it as by far the more important and valuable part of the work, throwing much needed light upon some very dark passages, especially of Job and Isaiah, in which, however, I doubt if they added much to the splendid translation of the Swiss Professor Segond, which seems to have more acceptance among French Christians, especially ministers, than the Revised Version has with us.

Speaking generally, I think the changes in the New Testament are an improvement, though the work fails to combine increased verbal accuracy with English as worthy of Queen Victoria's reign as that of the Authorised Version was worthy of King James I.; and the reason of minute changes is not always apparent, and so seems a regrettable disturbance of hallowed forms of speech and previous associations.

I reckon it, however, a considerable service to have undone the strange and persistent fault of the earlier translators by which the same Greek word is translated variously in the same passage to the concealment more or less of the sense. Sometimes, however, the Revisers have fallen into the old error. I will take a few examples of what I reckon the merits and faults of the work from the Epistle to the Romans.

The great subject of the epistle being the Righteousness of God, "a righteousness" in chap. i. 17 seems a miserable beginning. True, there is no article; but, as Winer says, "the article is omitted before such words as, signifying objects of which there is but one in existence, are nearly

equivalent to proper names," and he cites ἀρετή and σωφροσύνη as examples. Besides, ὀργή without the article immediately follows, and is translated "the wrath," although to be consistent "a wrath!" is absurdly put in the margin.

As the idea of righteousness is expressed by the same root no less than fifty-two times in the first eight chapters of this epistle, the constant thought might have been made more evident if the word just or justified had not been substituted in chap. ii. 13, iii. 4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30.

On the other hand, the identical translation of παρέδωκεν (suggesting successive stages of degradation), chap. i. 24, 26, 28; παραβάτης, ii. 25, 27; καταργέω, iii. 3, 31; ἐπιθυμέω, vii. 7, 8; and especially καυχώμεθα, indicating a progressive glorying which finds its climax in the appreciation of God Himself, chap. v. 2, 3, 11, is a distinct and helpful improvement.

In chap. iii. 11, "seeketh" allows nothing for the intensive prefix. We find this even removed from Heb. xi. 6, and yet left and emphasised in xii. 17 of the same epistle by the change of "carefully" to "diligently."

In Rom. v. 15, 16, χάρισμα, "the free gift" of the Authorised Version is left, though the word occurs fifteen times elsewhere, and is always rendered gift in the Authorised Version; while of the four instances occurring in Romans, only one has the word "free" prefixed by the Revised Version, and in any case the expression is redundant.

In chap. i. 20, "that they may be" is a harsh and, as the margin confesses, a needless alteration. I cannot but think a relation is intended and should be shown between τοὺς αἰῶνας (xi. 36) and τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ (xii. 2), showing the passing and exceptional character of "this present evil age," and corresponding with 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7, and 1 Pet. i. 18, 20 (πατροπαράδοτος and πρὸ καταβ. κόσμου).

One very slight point, not without significance, is the variation of "establish" (i. 12), and "stablish" (xvi. 21), where the exact recurrence of the word would remind, as the writer probably intended, that God only could do that of which He desired to be the instrument.

II.

By the Rev. D. C. TOVEY, M.A., Worplesdon Rectory, Guildford.

I do not see that the Revised Version can be considered to be a failure in any sense but one. The beauty of language has, in the New Testament Version, been sacrificed to increased accuracy. The Old Testament Revisers have been more careful, as far as my observation goes, in this respect.

Every one who is anxious to know the real meaning of the original ought to be infinitely obliged to the Revisers. In some places the true sequence of thought is revealed to many readers for the first time, e.g. "As my Father knoweth me, and I know the Father," etc., for which the *average* reader (I do not include the reader of the Greek Testament) had previously to seek in F. W. Robertson's sermon on the text. Those of us who *love* the English of 1611 and earlier, are sorry to miss certain idioms which *we* understand, but which are now either obsolete or rustic. Of the first an instance is, "Take no thought;" of the second, "I know nothing *by* myself."¹

Is it, or is it not, of importance that the world at large should know what is the true meaning of verses of the Psalms which are read in our churches daily, some of which, as they appear in the Prayer-Book Version are absolutely unmeaning? Is it, or is it not, important that we should see the force of St. Paul's argument, and really trace his train of thought, as in several passages of the Authorised Version we *cannot*? If the answer to these questions must be "yes," how can the Revised Version be accounted a failure?

III.

By Rev. A. C. G. RENDELL, Long Buckby Baptist Church.

Thank you much for the series of letters on the use of the Revised Version, which I find in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for March. I think your efforts in that line will prove very interesting and, I hope, instructive.

¹ This may be mere *dilettantism* in the second case; in the first we have the significant lesson that there was a time when "thought," "think," in our English speech, meant "anxious thought."

As a reader interested in the matter, I have pleasure in acceding to your request on page 241. I use the Revised Version a little, both in the study and the pulpit. It may be execrably bad taste, but I certainly do not take kindly to the "paragraphic" method of printing. It is most difficult to find quickly any given passage, or even sometimes to light upon the beginning of the chapter. I know, of course, that the division into chapter and verse is a comparatively modern device, and that, in some instances, the divisions are absolutely senseless and misleading; but, notwithstanding all this, my affections practically lean towards this method in preference to the other. I do not know if there is a Revised Version printed in the same way as the Authorised Version, but my humble opinion is, that if there were such an edition its chances of superseding the Authorised Version would be doubled if not trebled. Like many others, I live in hopes of a not long-distant retranslation. And if an entire rearrangement of "chapters," at any rate, could be made at the same time on sounder and more sensible principles, I for one would be greatly delighted.

IV.

By the Rev. H. DARRELL S. SWEETAPPLE, M.A., St. James' Vicarage, Gloucester.

The experience I have had as to the value and use of the Revised Version has not led me to alter in any degree the opinion I formed about it at its first issue. I always considered it a very valuable production, coming from an assembly of our best and most accurate scholars, and that it was a right and fit thing that there should be such a translation amongst us bearing the stamp of authority, and containing, or professing to contain, the best and latest results of modern criticism on the New Testament. I think the production of such a book has tended to increase the confidence of those who are not scholars, but who are yet intelligent and thinking people, in the holy words of Scripture. As to its ever being read in public, or taking the place of the Authorised Version, this was a thing that one would have thought its most ardent admirers could not have hoped for it. Surely all men can see that it is a book for the study, and not for the church. "Let all things be done decently," says the apostle, and it is not decent to read such bad English in church. It

can, in fact, hardly be expected that Englishmen should patiently listen to what is confessedly not English at all. The translation which is most literally exact (and if the Revised Version is not this, it is nothing), and which is the greatest assistance to the scholar plodding away at his Greek Testament, or to the one who refers to it for a painfully accurate rendering of the Greek into his own tongue, is always the one which is least fitted for intelligent public reading. The attempt at extreme literalism, I have always considered, put the most effectual bar to its ever being accepted in the Church.

Besides this, the fearful wreck of grammar which the Version presents, and its dreadful vulgarity, would be simply intolerable to ears accustomed to the grand roll and rhythm and Saxon English of our magnificent Authorised Version. I believe the English people have quietly noted and estimated these things, and have placed the translation in its proper position, where I apprehend it will remain. For my own part, I consider the public generally have taken a just and right view of the matter. They appreciate the efforts scholars have made on their behalf, they are very glad to have the little shilling edition (a book whose appearance is certainly not calculated to kindle devotion) in their houses, but they utterly decline, and always will decline, to use it, except for reference. Books, like water, soon find their proper level. The Revised Version has found its place, a place which I believe it will long continue to occupy.

It is, sir, perhaps rather beside the point you have in view to remark that amongst many scholars there is a widespread dissatisfaction as to the principles on which the translation has been made. For instance, the critical value of the MSS. whose authority is implicitly followed has been seriously impeached, and many of us think successfully impeached. Secondly, the principle of always translating the same Greek word by the same English one appears to many an unsound principle, however reasonable it appears at first sight. It has been found impossible to carry it out consistently, and often, where it has been done, nonsense has been the result. A word in Greek, as in English, does not always bear one fixed and definite meaning, and it is not always possible to find an English equivalent which exactly, and in every way, covers the Greek. This being the case, it may well be that the true sense is better expressed

by the employment of different, instead of similar, words. And thirdly, persons who are not very learned, and who cannot fathom the inscrutable depths of learned minds, are sometimes perplexed at some phenomena they meet with. They marvel and smile at the funny word "basketfuls" in St. Mark vi. 43, and wonder why it is so much better a translation of *κοφίνους πλήρεις* or even of *κοφίνων πληρώματα*, than the "baskets full of the fragments" of the old Authorised Version. And as for the treatment of the tenses, they often find it irritating and confounding to the last degree.

V.

By the Rev. GEORGE S. BARRETT, B.A.,
Norwich.

In my judgment the Revised Version has never yet had full justice done to it by the Churches of this country. The faults of the version, its defects in rhythm, its too minute scrupulosities of scholarship, its occasional textual deficiencies, and the unfortunate rule that in some cases has relegated to the margin both the better text and the better translation, have all been abundantly pointed out by its critics; but, on the other hand, the real nature and merits of the version have not been adequately acknowledged. For my own part, I can truly say that constant use of the Revised Version has only deepened my sense of its worth as a faithful translation of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The wonderful accuracy of the translation as a whole, the conscientiousness and thoroughness with which the work has been done, the large number of passages, especially in the prophetic portion of the Old Testament, which, for the first time, are made intelligible to the English reader, the new and unexpected light that a careful comparison of the Revised Version with the Authorised Version will often cast on many a familiar passage, all this and much else we owe to the Revised Version and to the men who, at large sacrifice of time and of strength, consecrated their learning to the sacred purpose of giving to the English-speaking nations of the world a faithful translation of the Word of God. Whether the Revised Version will ever become a popular version of the Scriptures may be doubted; of its value to the minister, the student, and to all who love Bible study there can, I imagine, be no doubt.

VI.

By the Rev. GEORGE DUNCAN, D.D., Hornsey Rise Baptist Church, London.

I always use the revised edition of the Bible in the class-room, at family worship, and in my private study of the Word; occasionally do I read it from the pulpit, but I always give its rendering of my texts. The more and the more closely I examine it, the better I like it. It quite grows on me, and is my close and much-prized companion. I venture to think that those who have most real need of it will value the work most highly. Many of its excellences lie on the surface; but hid away, as it were, from the mere casual reader, are gains of the first importance to Bible students. To the full extent of my influence do I urge my friends to read and to "search" the revised rendering of the Scriptures.

VII.

By the Rev. D. HOLLAND STUBBS, Penwortham Vicarage, Preston.

I always use the Revised Version in private, in the preparation of my sermons. The first thing I do, after selecting a subject and text, is immediately to turn to the Revised Version to see whether the newer translation throws additional light upon the text, or upsets any preconceived thoughts upon the subject. Several times have I had certain thoughts based upon the wording of the Authorised Version completely upset by the new light shed by the Revised Version. When discussing the two editions, I always refer to the 28th chapter of Job in the Authorised Version, and ask what it means verse by verse. It is astonishing what a variety of answers I get. Many can make nothing of some of the verses. But upon turning to the Revised Version the matter is as clear as possible. As a description of mining operations, I think this chapter exceedingly fine; it might almost have been written as a description of them in the present day. It is the same with other portions of the book.

As far as the failure of the Revised Version is concerned (and by that I take it to mean its not having come into general use), I consider all the blame lies with the bishops. Had they sanctioned its use in Church, at the discretion of the clergy, hundreds would have read the lessons from it in

preference to the Authorised Version. I shall be exceedingly glad when that day comes.

You are doing a good work, and just at the right time in bringing the subject before both clergy and laity.

VIII.

By Rev. CHAS. WHITAKER, B.A., Natland Parsonage, Kendal.

In reply to your inquiry, I cannot do less than acknowledge my indebtedness to the Revised Version of the New Testament, in regard to correct text and translation. But this has entirely to do with reference to the fifty or sixty men, who have read with me for Holy Orders, and to its critical value.

Even in this respect, however, I think it gives scarcely due weight to ancient versions, older than any MSS., and it certainly appears to me to give undue authority to two uncials above the others.

With regard to its *public* use, I am strongly of opinion that it is unsuitable. Many of the alterations are for the worse, as regards good English, and are pedantic. I prefer much the English of King James' Version.

Its *critical* value I acknowledge with limitations; its popular use I deprecate.

I could wish it were possible to revise it, and thus to make it acceptable for public use. You will have so many criticisms that I forbear to write further. The Old Testament seems to me to be more free from the criticisms which I have made on the New Testament revision. It is undoubtedly a great improvement, both for public and private use.

IX.

By Rev. J. HART, The Manse, Aberlady.

I have used the Revised Version regularly in public worship, and in my Bible class, since shortly after its publication, and, I think, with advantage. In preaching, and especially in lecturing, and in the Bible class, where some members retain and read from the Authorised, the difference in the versions forms a subject of continual interest and instruction, and leads to the searching of the Scriptures.

I am aware that some public teachers complain of a want of rhythm or roll in the sentences of the Revised Version. It seems to me, however, that in such a book, sense is far more important

than sound ; and there can be no doubt that, notwithstanding some defects, the Revised Version puts the mere English reader more nearly on a footing of equality with the Greek scholar, for the understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

X.

By the Rev. E. P. BOYS-SMITH, M.A., Hordle Vicarage, Lymington.

In the fortunes of the Revised Version I am greatly interested. Since its publication I have habitually used it myself, employing the version of 1611 only for reading the appointed lectures in Church ; for other purposes, in public and in private, I have used the Revised Version.

My experience certainly does not lead me to regard it as a "failure." No doubt it has not overcome the inertia of popular prejudice, backed as this is by the power of long prescription. This was hardly to be anticipated within some ten years. But I believe it to be steadily winning its way among the more intelligent and younger Bible-readers, and to be exerting an influence, silent, but not unimportant, already. The generation which had reached or passed middle-life at the time of the publication of the Revised Version has not shown it much favour (on the whole), and a large circle of Bible students, who use it in private, refrain from using it in public on account of this elder generation,—whether through considerateness or through timidity ; but that, as this generation is replaced by its successor, the Revised Version will receive wider and heartier recognition, there are, I think, many signs to show. My own experience goes to prove that those who try it become increasingly unwilling to lay it aside and rely upon the older version.

Three steps might be taken which would each go no small way in promoting the general acceptance of the Revised Version.

1. To authorise it concurrently with the established version for use in the Church liturgy.
2. To publish it at less cost (in type of legible size) ; the present prices making it difficult to procure copies for use in schools, Bible classes, etc., where many have to be used.
3. To publish editions with (good) marginal references ; the absence of which constitutes in the eyes of a considerable number a serious practical defect.

XI.

By Rev. G. E. FRENCH, B.A., Taunton.

In the January number you ask, "What is the experience of preachers, teachers, private students?" For myself, a plain curate, I may say that in private reading I invariably use the Revised Version (*i.e.* when not reading the original, or as a help to it), but in preaching and teaching the Authorised Version, the Revised Version being so little known to the laity, especially the poorer classes.

Will you allow me to suggest that part of the blame for the comparatively slow progress of the Revised Version ought to be laid at the door of the publishers? Why is it not brought out in the same style as the Authorised Version, and at the same price? The beautiful miniature Bible recently brought out by the Oxford Press is the Authorised Version. Why is it not the Revised Version?

XII.

By Rev. G. H. SING, M.A., St. John's Vicarage, Derby.

The question whether the Revised Version is a "failure" depends entirely upon the object with which we suppose it to have been drawn up. And I imagine that there is very great diversity of opinion as to what that object really was. If the object was to place in the hands of the English public and the English Church a version which should win its way into favour, and finally become authorised, so as to replace the present version, then undoubtedly the Revised Version is a failure. It has been introduced into very few Churches, and that only by vicars whose successors are likely enough to replace it by the Authorised Version ; and I have not heard of any case in which it has been adopted by any responsible body of people as the standard version of the Scriptures.

On the other hand, if it be regarded as simply a commentary upon the Authorised Version, as an aid to study, or, again, as an experiment towards the production of a version better than the Authorised—from any of these points of view it may be regarded as a partial success. The principle maintained by the Revisers of representing, wherever practicable, the same Greek word by the same English equivalent, though fatal to rhythm, and sometimes even to sense, is of value to the student who does not know Greek. The large

number of obvious improvements in translation have made it nearly indispensable to the thoughtful Englishman who wishes to understand his Bible; and the practice which obtains in many schools of making use, side by side, of the two versions, has stimulated study of the words of the Bible among the young.

But, on the whole, it is probable that the main value of the Revised Version is negative. The ordinary Englishman, excluding the small minority of students and teachers, does not want two Bibles, and until the Authorised Version is authoritatively replaced by a version which will give general satisfaction he will prefer the familiar words, phrases, rhythms, and blunders of that to which he has been used. The Revised Version has shown us what the Church and the people do

not want; they will be content to have errors corrected, but they want the changes reduced to the minimum of the absolutely necessary. But beyond the demonstration of this tendency in the Church, and the various helps which it has given to students, I do not see how the Revised Version can be called a success.

XIII.

By Rev. T. T. SHERLOCK, B.A., Congregational Church, Smethwick.

In reply to your request as to the use of the Revised Version, I have to say that I used it in public worship from the day it appeared. I never found any strong objection to its use. I find it in most pulpits. I believe its use is spreading.

The Moral and Devotional Value of the Old Testament.

BY THE REV. S. R. DRIVER, D.D., REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, AND CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH.

THE subject on which I have been invited to read—viz. the moral and devotional value of the Old Testament to the Christian Church—is one, I need hardly say, which it is impossible to treat with any approach to completeness in the limited space of twenty minutes. All that I can do is to illustrate briefly some of its more salient aspects, conscious all the time that I am leaving much unsaid, and fortunate in the thought that those who follow me will have an opportunity of supplying my omissions. Without in any degree derogating from the absolute ideal of life and conduct presented in the New Testament, I shall endeavour to show, in the time at my disposal, that the Old Testament possesses distinctive characteristics of its own, which must ever secure for it a paramount position and influence in the Church.

In the first place then, and generally, the Old Testament has a value peculiar to itself, from the fact that the truths which it inculcates are set forth with great variety of external form, and with superlative grace of imagery and diction. These features, though it is true they are but external ones, must not be underrated in our estimate of the Old Testament as a whole. The preacher, not less than the poet or the orator, makes it his

aim to impress, by a choice and appropriate literary style, those whom he addresses; and had the truths which the Bible enunciates been presented in an unformed, uncultured literary garb, without the melody of rhythm and diction which actually accompanies them, we may be sure that its influence upon mankind would have been very much less than it has been. The variety of form, and the literary excellence, displayed in the Old Testament, are both surprising. There is history and biography, both penetrated more or less visibly by ethical and religious ideas; there is the oratory of Deuteronomy and the Prophets, the aim of which is to enforce more directly the same truths; there poetry of varied types—lyrical, elegiac, and even, in a rudimentary form, dramatic—in which the emotions, fired by religious ardour, or suffused (Song of Songs) by a warm moral glow, find deep and pure expression. And each of these literary forms possesses, all but uniformly, that peculiar charm and grace of style, which entitles it to be ranked as “classical.” History, oratory, poetry, each is of a type which, in its kind, cannot be surpassed. The bright and picturesque narrative of the historical books, the grand and impressive oratory of the Prophets, the delicacy and lightness