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JOURNAL OF

# THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

# The Victoria Institute,

OR,

## Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

*Secretary:* E. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S.

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1916.

## 574TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER, ON MONDAY, JANUARY 17TH, 1916, AT 4.30 P.M.

A. W. OKE, ESQ., B.A., LL.M., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the preceding Meeting were read and confirmed.

The SECRETARY announced the election of Mr. Benjamin Akhurst, the Rev. John William Fairhurst, the Rev. Matthew Butterworth Moorhouse, and the Rev. P. Rose, as Associates of the Institute, and of the Rev. Isaac Levinson as Missionary Associate.

The CHAIRMAN asked Mr. E. J. Sewell to address the Meeting on the subject of "The Principles governing Bible Translation."

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### *THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING BIBLE TRANSLATION.* By E. J. SEWELL, Esq.

TRANSLATION of the Bible is a special case of the problem of translation from one language into another; it would be quite logical, therefore, to begin by setting out the general principles of translation and then discussing the limitations or qualifications of these general principles required when they are applied to translations of the Bible. The writer proposes almost to reverse this order, for it appears to him that by so doing not only will the paper be shortened but we shall come at once to close quarters with the really crucial questions which are raised when we come to consider the character of the Bible and the purposes for which translations of it are required.

It is usual to begin discussions either of the interpretation or translation of the Bible by the statement that the Bible is a book and must be dealt with like other books. To the writer this sentence seems to contain a serious misstatement and a fallacy. The Bible is not a book: The Old Testament is itself a literature—nearly all that is left of ancient Hebrew literature—and even the New Testament contains, beside straightforward narrative, hymns, parables, closely reasoned argument, passionate pleading, and the poetical and highly imaginative prose of the Apocalypse; all these are

the work of many very different writers. The first clause, therefore, viz., that the Bible is a book—is a mis-statement.

It may be thought that even though it be a mis-statement, that is a matter which has no bearing on the business of translation. But this is not so. Let us substitute in the original phrase the true description. The Bible is the remains of an ancient literature by many different authors, and therefore it ought to be dealt with in the matter of translation like—like what? like other ancient literatures by many different authors. But who has ever translated a literature? And it will in practice be found that whenever anyone proposes to lay down rules for translating the Bible borrowed from the experience of other translators, the rules are derived from the translation of some one book, or, at least, of the works of some one author, Plato or Homer or Dante. Now let us suppose the case of a man translating into Chinese. If he had to deal with a straightforward prose narrative, he might have no great difficulty, and the principles on which he should work would be fairly simple and straightforward. But let him next have to take in hand a passage of imaginative and impassioned prose from the writings of Milton or Burke or De Quincey. I need not occupy your time by quoting them: the kind of passage I mean will be familiar to you all. Now, the questions that would arise for settlement in deciding how to render such passages as these into Chinese would be far more numerous and more complicated than in the case of a plain narrative. And if our imaginary translator went on to render a poetical passage—for instance, one of Shakespeare's sonnets, such as that beginning—

> Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> Flatter the mountain-top with sovereign eye,
> Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
> Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

and so on—after, I say, our translator had rendered this into Chinese or Swahili, he would have been compelled to find answers to a number of questions as to principles and methods of translation which would not arise in dealing with a single book or even with a single author.

It will, I think, follow that the rules laid down even by very eminent and successful translators who have dealt only with a single book or a single author will by no means necessarily apply, as general principles, in dealing with matter of such great variety as the contents of all the books of the Old and New Testaments.

The second statement that the Bible should be dealt with exactly as other books are dealt with is, in my opinion, a fallacy. The Bible should only *be dealt with* like other books if it *is* like other books, and this it is not. The books of which it is composed are the work of men who claim that they spoke under the special guidance and control of the Holy Spirit. This is the lowest statement of their claim: many would go much further in describing it, but even so stated it is sufficient to make the Bible unique and *not* like other books. For it must be borne in mind that the great majority of those who desire and use translations of the Bible either accept, or at least do not reject, this claim on its behalf, and that the Bible therefore possesses for them an authority which rules out many freedoms in translating quite admissible in ordinary cases. A translation in which such freedoms are used cannot but contain much of the opinion of the particular translator as to the meaning of many passages and, in so far as it does that, it is vitiated as a representative of the authoritative character of the work. Now, a translation of the Bible which is made upon general lines which render it unacceptable to the great majority of Christian readers may be an interesting experiment, a literary curiosity, or a work valuable for suggesting and stimulating thought, but it can take no permanent place as a solution of the problem of Bible translation.

The two points just considered are general considerations and are applicable to all translations of the Bible. The next case to be dealt with is that of versions like Luther's German Bible or our Authorized Version. Both these have become classics in the literature of Germany and England respectively, and their language has, in the centuries during which they have been current, been thoroughly incorporated in the thought and literature of their respective countries. Many words and phrases taken from our English Bible have become embedded in poetry, sermons, speeches, and devotional literature, and have taken a permanent place in the English language. To this must be added the hold which the well-known language of the English Bible has obtained in the hearts of all religious men and women by its constant use in public worship and private devotion until a proposal to change it seems almost sacrilegious.

This state of affairs must necessarily exercise an enormous influence on any proposal for a fresh translation or even for any further revision of the Authorized Version. The Revised Version took many years to complete: it was the work of all the chief Biblical scholars of the time when it was made; it corrects

many acknowledged errors and defects in the Authorized Version; it has been in the hands of Englishmen for thirty years, but it is very far from taking the place of the Authorized Version; on the contrary, the number of copies of the Revised Version sold is said to be rather decreasing than increasing and the Version itself has not anywhere come into general use. There is therefore little ground for supposing that a new version which should still further depart from the language of the Authorized Version could hope for general acceptance. And yet many scholars and many ordinary readers of the Bible have felt that the Elizabethan English of the Authorized Version, dignified and beautiful as it is, is a great obstacle to the full and easy comprehension of its contents, more especially in primary and even secondary schools and among labourers and artizans and other such persons whose scanty leisure gives them little time or inclination for learning the meaning of unfamiliar phraseology.

It is quite probable that the antiquated language of the Bible is a hindrance to the understanding of its meaning in the case of classes more extensive than those just specified.

This hindrance has been so widely realized, that many translations, more especially of the New Testament, in "modern English" have been put forward. Where this has been done by competent scholars, the result has been of such great interest and value that it compels us to face the question whether, in the case of the English Version (and of other versions, the conditions of which are similar), the true principle is that adopted by these scholars, or that laid down for the revisers who produced the Revised Version, viz., "to limit, as far as possible, the expression of alterations of the text of the Authorized Version to the language of the Authorized and earlier English Versions." In other words, should the language of the Authorized Version be scrupulously preserved and imitated in alterations (where alterations are necessary) or should it be freely altered by the introduction of modern phraseology wherever the old language is not at once and easily intelligible to a modern reader who has no acquaintance (or very little) with the English of three or four hundred years ago?

The problem has been stated as it bears on the English Version, because that is the version most familiar to an English audience. But it has equally to be solved in dealing with Luther's version in German, and it arises, in a modified degree, in several European languages where a translation made

centuries ago lies at the basis of nearly every translation or revision made since.

The answer to the question formulated above depends, to a great extent, upon the object for which an English translation of the Bible is desired. If it is desired in order to bring to the minds of the largest number of English men, women and children, with as little difficulty as possible, the real teaching which the authors of the various books of the Bible desired to convey, a translation into good modern English would be generally admitted to be far the best means of attaining this object. The very qualities of style for which the Authorized Version is praised have a tendency to conceal the meaning; a man who feels a profound admiration for the rhythm or stately beauty of a phrase is apt to be satisfied by admiring it and to omit going on to inquire exactly what it means.

It cannot, I think, be alleged that it was the aim of the translators of 1611 to produce a literary classic. If they had had any such purpose it is probable that the style of Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia* would have been that adopted. They seem to have tried to translate into good, simple, and generally intelligible English of their own day, and they did this so thoroughly and well that their work has become one of the literary treasures of the language. But, in 300 years, their language is becoming archaic and in many instances an obstacle rather than an aid to the understanding of the meaning. As time goes on this process will continue and increase.

Is it not time that we followed the example of the translators of 1611 instead of clinging blindly to their results? Some recent efforts as regards the New Testament seem to show that the matter is in the air.* The results are so helpful, so informing and stimulating in private reading that it is impossible to avoid longing for the time when such help may become available to all the world from the production of a version of the whole Bible into good and dignified modern English by the co-operation of scholars who, in addition to possessing a thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, know and can use all the resources of the English language.

It is of course freely admitted that in the present state of opinion such a version could not hope to replace the Authorized Version, but if it were well and successfully executed it would

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* *E.g.*, Dr. Weymouth's *New Testament in Modern Speech. The New Testament: A New Translation.* By Jas. Moffatt, D.D., D.Lit.

have a powerful effect in changing public opinion, which already shows some signs of modification on this subject. And the effect of such a version in making the Bible a more vivid and interesting book would be nearly incalculable.

The subject just discussed is one relating only to versions in certain languages and is not of general application. But it leads directly to the consideration of a question which has to be solved in the case of all versions of the Bible made into languages which have reached any stage of literary culture. As instances there may be mentioned Chinese, the literary languages of India, Arabic, and other languages. In all these cases, the literary cultivation of the language and the existence of a class of scholars has brought into being two forms of the language, one the literary form used by and familiar to scholars, and the other the language of everyday life. And, by the language of everyday life, I do not mean rustic or merely colloquial forms of speech, but the language of ordinary educated people in letters, sermons, speeches in law-courts, as well as in the ordinary transactions of everyday life. There are, we are told, many cases in which these two forms of the language are entirely different, not merely in vocabulary hut also in the grammatical forms adopted in connecting words and phrases into sentences. And here, the question at once arises —which form of the language is to be adopted for the translation of the Bible? The one form of the language is the literary standard; it is that used in works considered to be masterpieces of the language; to have acquired it and to use it is the mark of a scholar, and a book couched in any other language is liable to provoke dislike and contempt among scholars. On the other hand, since the overwhelming majority of people in every country are not scholars, to them a translation into the language of scholars is not easily understood, its form is an obstacle to its being accepted by them and is likely to lead to its being admired for its learned character—and neglected—a result the very opposite of that which is the aim of all translations of the Bible. We have to choose between the disapproval of scholars and literary authorities, if the one be adopted, and neglect on the part of people in general if we select the other.

In Chinese, the solution adopted has been to have two translations, one (Wenli) into the language of scholars and the other (Mandarin) into what is, by comparison, the language of the people. And, in other cases, the same result, though not formally adopted and carried out, is beginning to develop. In some of the Indian languages where the standard style set by

the Universities for writing in the vernacular has been adopted for the translation, those who work among the people have found it necessary to make and circulate translations into what is called "colloquial language." The same course has been adopted, because it was found necessary, in Arabic: at present it is confined to the New Testament and to the Gospels in the New Testament, but it is not very likely that it will stop there. In proportion to the extent to which the "colloquial" translation is found easy and intelligible by those to whom the standard translation is difficult and unintelligible, will be their demand that the process should, for their benefit, be extended to other books of the New Testament and after that to at least the principal books of the Old Testament.

But this cannot be regarded as a satisfactory solution. It has always been the aim of all engaged in translation of the Bible to have only one version current in each language. The fact of the general use of the Bible in public worship makes this highly desirable, and so the question inevitably arises: which Bible is to be read in church—that one which is generally understood or that one which is admired but not generally understood? The answer can hardly be doubtful. In China it is, I believe, the Mandarin version which is used in public worship. And if this be so, then that version which is so used must be the standard version. It follows that the principle governing the production of the version which is intended to be the standard version must be that the style to be adopted in it must be one that makes it easily intelligible to the people in general who speak the language into which the translation is being made.

If ever a translation is to be made which shall effect a compromise between the two styles, it will have to be the work of native scholars and not of foreigners.

The questions dealt with hitherto have been somewhat of the nature of subsidiary or preliminary questions, inasmuch as they deal with cases which, though very important, are still special cases. But the Bible has been translated into all the principal languages spoken in the world, and in considering these translations we come to the main question which faces every translator of the Bible—*i.e.*, the extent to which what is called "freedom" in translation is admissible. There is such a thing as a paraphrase as distinguished from a translation. Where does the dividing line fall, and is it possible to lay down any definite principle as to what constitutes a translation and distinguishes it from a paraphrase?

On the one hand, all translators from the days of Jerome have agreed with him in rejecting the rule expressed in the phrase, *verbum verbo reddere*. Even as regards words, it is impossible to find in any language single words exactly equivalent to single words in another language; and, beside this, the idioms of one language differ altogether from those of another. We are told that the Hebrew words in Genesis ii, 17, are, if literally translated, "dying, thou shalt die." But this is not a translation of the phrase. The Hebrew idiom makes the phrase convey to anyone who knows Hebrew what is represented in English and other languages by the phrase "thou shalt surely die," because this is what the phrase means.

Can we then adopt as a sufficient statement of the rule to be followed in such cases, that the thought must be translated and not the words, that is to say that if a translation of the words does not convey the real meaning of the phrase, we should depart from the words in order to keep to the thought which those who used them intended them to convey. All translators, or at all events all modern translators, have, in many instances, followed this rule, but it is not difficult to show that if it is proposed to lay it down as a fundamental rule of translation, it requires, on the one hand, some further limitation and, on the other, a distinction to be drawn dependent upon the particular cause which prevents the actual words from conveying the thought.

The maxim requires some limitation: take, for instance, the magnificent description of the Deity in the 46th Psalm:—"He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire."

To those to whom these words were addressed, the bow, the spear, the chariot, were the chief representatives of the weapons and instruments of war, and the destruction of each one of them in a way appropriate to each one, conveyed in a very forcible manner the idea of a complete stoppage of war by the destruction of the instruments of war.

But many millions of men (say, in Europe, now) have never seen a chariot, and bows and spears are only known as warlike weapons to those who have read about them or seen pictures of them as such. So far from forcibly conveying the meaning, the use of the names of these weapons, etc., has itself to be explained before the meaning is grasped. Would it then be permissible to translate: "He bursteth the rifle and bendeth back the bayonet, He bloweth up the battle cruiser with dynamite!"? The question answers itself; no one would propose or accept

that as a translation, and yet it conforms to the letter of the rule of translating the thought and not the words. It would be easy to multiply examples:—We are forbidden in the tenth Commandment to covet our neighbour's ox or his ass. Who, in these days, would covet an ox or an ass? The one represented to the Hebrew valuable property available for exchange, and the other the means of locomotion. Would it therefore be a translation of the Commandment to prohibit the coveting of gilt-edged stocks or a motor-car?

The fact is that there are two elements of difficulty to be overcome in making a phrase or passage in any language intelligible to a man ignorant of that language—one is the words and idioms of the language itself, another is the manner of thought, habits, customs and surroundings which often give their point to the words used. To take the first instance given above: when the Hebrew words for bow, spear and chariot have had their English equivalents substituted for them they have been translated as far as the language is concerned, but to convey the meaning of the passage in which they are used, their employment as the names of the principal weapons of war, and therefore symbolizing warlike operations, must be explained; this, however, is the function of the expositor or commentator, not of the translator.

This illustration will, I trust, make clear what I mean when I say that, in my opinion, the duty of a translator is to put his reader who is ignorant of the language translated, as far as possible, in the position of one who knows *the language*, and that when he has done that, he has done all that is required of a translator. If he goes further, he passes beyond the function of a translator and undertakes the duty of explanation and comment.

One or two examples may make the application of this principle clearer. Some translators have held that in the phrase—"Behold the Lamb of God!" the word—Lamb—is so connected with the sacrificial system of the Jews, that a literal translation will, to the minds of people to whom a lamb is just the young of a sheep and nothing else, convey nothing of the meaning which it had in the mouth of John the Baptist. They would therefore propose to translate in some such way as this: "Behold the sacrificial victim appointed by God." Now, apart from the objection that such a version omits the element of purity and innocence connected with the idea of a lamb, it will, I think, be generally admitted that it is an explanation rather than a translation. The most intimate knowledge of Greek

would not lead any man to give this meaning to the Greek words Ὁ Ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, it must be derived from a knowledge of the special circumstances in the history of the speaker and his hearers which gave the words that meaning to their minds. It is admitted that the full meaning of the name—Lamb of God—cannot be conveyed without such knowledge, but so to give the meaning is the business of the expositor, not of the translator; and accordingly the rule proposed would exclude such a translation.

On the other hand, the translation:—"Behold Him who is the Lamb of God"—meets much if not all of the difficulty and is quite admissible under the rule stated. For a knowledge of Greek combined with ordinary intelligence would show that the speaker did not intend the assertion that the Person addressed was in fact the actual young of a sheep, but that the name was used metaphorically; that is a fact inherent in the original and it is therefore permissible to convey it in a translation in the manner specified, or in any other manner which is permitted by the idiom of the language into which the translation is being made. Many languages have special grammatical forms for indicating that a word is used metaphorically.

Another example may be found in a passage taken from the 46th Psalm: "Hope thou in God who is the health of my countenance and my God." The phrase—health of my countenance—is rhythmical and the ideas of countenance and health have a superficial connection, so that many who read or hear the phrase let it pass without any close consideration of its meaning. But if we stop and ask ourselves what precisely the Psalmist can be supposed to have meant by calling God—the health of his countenance—we shall realize that the words hardly convey to us any definite meaning. If, however, we turn to the recent French translation known as the "Version Synodale," or to Dr. Segond's translation, we find the phrase rendered—"Il est mon salut et mon Dieu"—and the translation is justified in this way. The Hebrew word—my face—is said in the dictionaries to mean also—my presence, my person—and therefore to be equivalent to myself. The word translated—health—is almost everywhere else, both in the A.V. and the R.V., rendered salvation, so that the health of my countenance becomes the salvation of myself, *i.e.*, my salvation.

These are purely questions of language, and if the statements as to the usage and meaning of the Hebrew words are correct, the translation is, so far, fully justified under the proposed principle.

But some translators have gone further and rendered the phrase:—"He is my Saviour and my God." In so doing, it appears to me that they have stepped over the boundary line between the result of translation and that of explanation or commentary. No doubt the statement—"He is my salvation" can be explained—"He is the author or cause of my salvation" —*i.e.*, my Saviour, but this *is* an explanation. No doubt, "He is my Saviour and my God" is clearer and more striking than "He is my salvation and my God," but this clearness and emphasis is obtained not by rendering but by improving the original.

To sum up:—It is quite true that it is the business of a translator to translate the thought rather than the words, but he is concerned with the language and with that only. So far as the thought is conveyed by the words, it is his business to convey it, but it is not his business to try and get into his translation everything that the words convey, and to that extent the maxim cannot be adopted as a safe guide.

Much less is it possible to adopt the principle which has sometimes been laid down that it should be the object of a translator to furnish what we may suppose that the original author would have said if he had been writing in our age and country. To do this would not only be more than a translation, more than a paraphrase, more than a commentary, it would be nothing less than to re-write the book.

A matter cognate to that just discussed is the subject of the insertion of words necessary in one language though not in another for the completion of the sense. A familiar example is that of the copula—is—which is very frequently required in most languages where it is not expressed in Hebrew and Greek. It is, of course, common knowledge that the translators of the English Bible have been very scrupulous in indicating all such additions by printing the words so added in italic type. A comparison of the Authorized and Revised Versions with regard to this matter shows at once that the revisers of the English version did not think it necessary to indicate, in this way, the addition of words absolutely required by English idiom to make the sentence good English. They have inserted the words just as the translators of 1611 did, but they have not in any way indicated their insertion. And this is, no doubt, right. The words which they have added are, according to the practice to which they have scrupulously adhered, not really additions. They are latent in the original languages, the idiom of which did not permit, or did not require, their expression. Their

expression in other languages is due to the idiom of the language in which their expression is required. And the device of indicating such words by printing them in italic type has not been at all generally adopted, even in languages printed in Roman character in which it is easily possible.

In languages printed in other than Roman characters, however, such a device as this can seldom be adopted, and in most Oriental languages any difference of type is impossible. The printing of such words in brackets or in lighter type has, in these languages, the result of calling special attention to them. As they are usually decidedly unimportant words, that is exactly the effect which it is *not* desired to produce.

In the great majority of versions there is no indication at all of the fact that words are, for this reason, inserted. This is of no practical importance so long as the rule of only inserting such words as are really inherent in the original is observed. But many translators have given very considerable extension to this rule, and as there is nothing at all in the text to show what part absolutely and expressly represents the original, and what is added for one reason or another, it seems very desirable to have, if possible, some rule regulating such additions.

One fertile source of such additions is the use of the genitive case in Greek to indicate a great variety of relations between the words so connected, contrasted with the very restricted use of the same case in a great many languages. Thus the phrase—the love of God—can both in Greek and in English be used either for the love of God for man or for the love felt by man for God. But there are very many languages in which neither of these two ideas can be conveyed by the mere use of the genitive: it is necessary to insert words showing clearly which is meant.

Again, St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Romans ii, 16, of "my Gospel." There are many languages in which this must be expanded into—the gospel which I preach or the gospel which I teach—or some such phrase. In them the only meaning of—my gospel—would be the Gospel which I own. Our translators have usually acted on the supposition that the use of our English genitive was as wide as that of the Greek genitive, but it is doubtful whether they have always been justified in the supposition. In the verse (Hebrews xiii, 20):—"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant . . .," if we were not so used to the words, we should, I think, realize that the phrase—the blood of the

covenant—was not English, and that it needed the addition of several words to express the relation intended between "the blood" and "the covenant."

The additions in these cases are made necessary by difference of idiom in the two languages in question, but the danger attending them is obvious; the additional words fix upon the passage one of several possible meanings: that meaning is the one chosen by the translator, but it passes into the text, and where (as is generally the case) there is nothing to distinguish this part of the text from any other the reader has no means of knowing that part of what he finds in the book is merely the translator's opinion on a point on which opinions may well differ.

It seems to follow that, while such additions may be, and indeed must be, admitted into the text, there should always be a marginal note giving a literal translation of the original.

The considerations which have just been described make it necessary that such additions of words should be rigidly limited to the cases in which they are really inherent in the original. But, in fact, they have often been made in cases in which they merely help to make the meaning clearer or more definite. Such additions appear to be quite illegitimate. The following instances may serve to illustrate the writer's meaning:—Dr. Weymouth (*The New Testament in Modern Speech*) translates Mark i, 38: "He replied, 'Let us go elsewhere to the neighbouring country towns, that I may proclaim my errand there also: for for that purpose I came from God.'" The words—from God—are an addition. The A.V. and R.V. have:—"For therefore (R.V. to this end) came I forth."

It is possible that Dr. Weymouth has given the true meaning, but it is certainly not inherent in the Greek word (ἐξῆλθον).

Dr. Moffatt (*The New Testament: A New Translation*) translates it:—"That is why I came out here," so that competent scholars differ on the point, and this seems to make the insertion inadmissible.

Another instance is the case of Abraham looking upon the scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The narrative says (Genesis xix, 28), "And Abraham looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah." We are told that the Hebrew word means "looked down," and a translator has therefore rendered the passage, "Abraham looked down from a mountain," inserting the words "from a mountain." No doubt if Abraham looked down upon the plain where Sodom and Gomorrah stood, he

could only have done so from a height above the plain, but this is a mere inference from the geographical position and not inherent in the language. It is therefore an explanation and not a translation.

The distinction seems clear, and one that ought to be observed.

There has already been occasion to give some consideration to the rival claims of accuracy and intelligibility. A very similar question arises in connection with the use, to express Christian ideas, of words in very general use, but tainted with heathen associations. This is a difficulty which faces almost every translator at the outset of his work when he has to find a word for God. But it occurs in many other connections also. Many heathen religions have a system of sacrifices and words for sacrifice; they also have words corresponding to "heaven" and "hell" to describe the world inhabited after death by the pious and the wicked. But the sacrifices in question are very often sacrifices to evil demons to avert their wrath, and the word in common use for sacrifice cannot be freed from the association of such ideas. The same objection applies in the other case mentioned; the words commonly used to represent "heaven" and "hell" are the names of some specific heaven or hell of the mythology of the country, and convey to the people ideas quite foreign to the conception which Christian teachers would desire to convey.

There are two methods which have been adopted for dealing with this case, and they differ so fundamentally that the difference may be described as a difference of principle. One is to adopt some neutral or colourless term *into* which Christian converts and those under instruction can be taught to read the Christian idea. The principal objection to this course is that such words are nearly always unfamiliar, and not in general use. The other course is to use the heathen word with all its undesirable associations as a word thoroughly familiar to the people, and to trust to Christian instruction to lead those who use it to read *out* of the word all those ideas which it connotes which are in conflict with Christian ideas.

Both these courses have strong advocates and opponents. As far as my knowledge goes, the majority of *foreign* translators favour the use of the familiar word in spite of its associations, while the objections to that method have usually been put forward by natives of the country, themselves converts from heathenism, and therefore specially sensitive to the distinctively heathen ideas which such words connote.

The decision may be said to lie between intelligibility marred by the danger of erroneous teaching, and freedom from error marred by the danger of obscurity. There is evidently room for difference of opinion, and either principle can be supported by weighty argument. For my own part, I would allow the opinion of Christian converts from heathenism to govern the decision. Foreigners, even though they are missionaries, are apt to regard the objects of heathen worship too much from their grotesque or merely revolting side. Only those who have been under the sway of the dark superstitions connected with their former gods and goddesses can realize the foreboding fear which they still arouse, or the remains of a lurking belief in them, at least as evil demons, which it is so difficult entirely to eradicate. Men to whom a language is vernacular are not likely to undervalue the advantage words derive from familiarity and easy intelligibility. If they are willing to forego such advantages, the reason must be a strong one. I would advocate, therefore, that in such questions as have been described the decision should be governed by the prevailing opinion among Christian converts from heathenism, and would follow their opinion whether or not it commended itself to foreign students of the language.

We pass now to the question of the principle which should guide a translator who can find in the language into which he is translating no equivalent at all (or no satisfactory equivalent) for ideas or words in the original language. In such a case there can be no translation in the strict sense of the word. People who are absolutely without a particular idea cannot have framed words which convey that idea. Still more is it true in the case of material objects, that in a country where they do not and never have existed the language can have no name for them. In all such cases recourse must be had to one of several devices other than true translation. Among these are transliteration of the original, the borrowing of words from another cognate language or a language recognized as a standard, such as, for instance, Sanscrit for Indian languages, Arabic for languages of that stock, and English for countries under the influence of England, whose languages are in a low state of development.

In default of these plans, it is necessary to have recourse to paraphrase or explanatory phrases. Where tents are unknown, the word has been rendered by "cloth-house," and in countries where there are no bees and therefore honey is unknown, some descriptive phrase such as "exceedingly sweet food" is the only possible rendering.

Perhaps I may be allowed a short digression here. There is a story which has gained wide circulation with regard to the rendering into the Eskimo language of the phrase "Lamb of God." It is to the effect that since sheep are unknown among these people, the translation of the New Testament in their language renders this phrase "the young seal of God," seals being one of the few animals known familiarly to them. I have read the story in an article in the *Quarterly Review*, and it has been told on the platform by a bishop. There is, however, excellent authority for saying that there is not a word of truth in the statement. In the different dialects of Eskimo, the words for sheep and lamb are in one dialect sava and savārkap, in another saugak and saugarsuk.

These words are said to be derived from Icelandic, for sheep exist in Iceland. On the other hand, the common word for "seal" in Eskimo is "puije"; the smaller variety is called "netsek," the diminutive of which is netsiak (used of a very young seal whose hair is still quite white). Other forms are used to describe the seal at various stages of its life, but none of them has the most distant connection with the root "sau," which is the basis of the words used for "lamb" in translating the New Testament into all the Eskimo dialects. The story may therefore be dismissed as an absolute fable.

There are some other problems of Bible translation to which reference might be made, but enough has probably been said on the subject. The main contentions which I have endeavoured to put forward are these.

The Bible is unique as the work of men writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; being, for that reason, regarded as authoritative, the freedom allowable in the translation of other books is inadmissible here.

Literal translation is as impossible in the case of the Bible as in other cases. The maxim that the thought should be translated rather than the words is, to a certain extent, an excellent guide, but if adopted and followed to the full, it would authorize an amount of freedom to which few people would consent, and therefore requires limitation and definition.

In dealing with any passage in the Bible, we must all desire that its full and true meaning should be conveyed to the reader, but to do this goes beyond the duty of a translator, and the effort to make a translation serve as a commentary and exposition as well as a translation is an attempt to combine distinct and inconsistent aims.

A translator is concerned with language, and the guiding

principle of his work should be to put his reader, as far as such a thing is possible, in the position of one to whom the language of the original is thoroughly known. So far as the vocabulary and idiom of the language are concerned, he *should* translate the thought and not the words: so far as the thought depends upon elements outside the language, he should not attempt to embody it in his translation. Least of all should he attempt to re-write his original as it may be supposed that the author would have written it if he had produced it at the time and place in which the translation comes into existence.

I am far from supposing that these conclusions will as a whole meet with general acceptance. Probably no one who hears or reads them will agree with them all, while every single contention put forward will be likely to find some who disapprove in that particular.

But the work of the translation of the Bible is one of the most vital importance: there are many hundreds of languages into which no part of the Bible has yet been translated; in very many of those in which something has been done, many more books remain to be dealt with; and even in those main languages of the world into which the whole Bible, or at least the New Testament, has been translated, need is constantly felt for the revision and improvement of existing versions.

It results that many hundreds of men all over the world are at work on this business, often in small bodies isolated from one another, and dealing over and over again with the same problems, in ignorance of the general character of the results which have been arrived at elsewhere. It is therefore very desirable that an attempt should be made to arrive at some general principles which may be accepted as governing all such undertakings, and it is to the attainment of that object as a result of full consideration and discussion that this paper is intended to contribute.

## Discussion.

The Chairman agreed with the Lecturer that the Bible was a unique book; it had indeed been fittingly called "The sacred library." Those who forgot that it was not a single book but a literature missed much. Mr. Sewell had rightly emphasized the difficulties of translation, difficulties which threw into relief the wonderful character of the translation made by Tyndale. In 1845, Bagster brought out a New Testament in which five English

versions were seen side by side. The old translations possessed one great advantage in that they were usually the work of one man. Luther's Bible was a case in point, and Wycliffe's was generally assumed to be such, though latterly it had been thought that Wycliffe's Bible was the work of a Committee.

Professor MARGOLIOUTH said that translators were in the main careful and conscientious in reproducing the meaning of the original. But sometimes they allowed themselves to give a paraphrase rather than a literal translation, and under such circumstances an expression or phrase might be used which conveyed an idea not in the original, and that idea was sure to be taken up. Thus he had himself in translating Aristotle used the word "torso." The phrase was not in the original, but his translation had given rise to the impression that it was. The older translations tended to be verbal. Thus there were five or six Syriac versions and each was more faithful than its predecessor, so much so that the original Greek texts could be largely restored from the last versions. But at the same time the later versions became more clumsy and to some extent unintelligible; there seemed no way of avoiding the dilemma; if the translation was absolutely literal it would not suit an ordinary audience; if the translation were free it might be misunderstood and be cited as a support for doctrines which were not in the original. Thus the expression concerning Joseph in the Psalms, "the iron entered into his soul," was graphic and powerful, but it was not in the original: the passage simply meant that he was put into chains. There seemed but one solution, a double translation, one for scholars and one for the people; that for scholars should be absolutely literal, since scholars could understand it.

One fact had not been alluded to by the Lecturer which, nevertheless, was much felt by Biblical scholars. In several places in the New Testament, in many more in the Old Testament, we had no certain knowledge of the meaning of the text. In many cases we find words that occur but once only. There is no known method of discovering the meaning of a word unless it is told elsewhere. Other sources of information are therefore eagerly seized upon. Thus in the ninth and tenth centuries the Jews thought that they could get help from Arabic, since that was a kindred language. Much more recently Assyrian has been referred to for a similar

purpose. But kindred races use allied words in different senses, and no one now would look out a Hebrew word in an Arabic dictionary, and Assyriologists were now much soberer than they were twenty or thirty years ago.

Dr. KILGOUR desired to express his appreciation of a most excellent paper. He had not often an opportunity of saying anything about Mr. Sewell, as usually, when they were associated, Mr. Sewell was in the Chair and he was at his side.

The paper dealt with questions with which the Bible House was continually familiar. The Committee had prepared and printed a pamphlet of rules for the guidance of translators and revisers based upon principles derived from the experience of over a hundred years. These rules were not absolute, as in practice difficult cases would arise, but the main principle was that the translation should be intelligible to the readers; not so much beneath the ordinary spoken language as to lose dignity, nor so much above the heads of the reader as to be misunderstood. In general it was felt that it was safest for the translation to be as literal as the idiom of the language permitted. Even ordinary people would eventually be able to understand the meaning to be conveyed, though perhaps they might not grasp it at first. It was not the common experience that a double version, one for the scholar and another in colloquial language, was necessary; though there were a few exceptions, as, for example, in China and some parts of India. Translations which at first might appear to be too learned in style were not necessarily beyond the reader. Thus, for example, the translation of the New Testament in Nepali had sometimes been criticized as too scholarly. One young missionary had complained of a particular word, saying he had never heard it used. That very afternoon he heard it in a bazaar; he had simply not come across it earlier. After a translation was finished (and translators should merely translate, they must not comment or give their own ideas), the reader must be left to receive, with the Spirit's help, the deeper meanings of the Word. He believed that from the East especially there would come back to us of the West marvellous experiences of the riches of the Eternal Message. No Bible translation, even though prepared by a committee of natives, could be alone absolutely unmistakable, or at once perfectly understood. We should remember how much we ourselves had learned by trying to understand passages which at

first appeared obscure. We ought not to deprive young nations of the benefits of a similar experience.

Mr. J. C. DICK desired to thank the Lecturer for a most suggestive paper and expressed regret that it was not already in print. Two points seemed to him to require a little more consideration than had been accorded to them in the lecture. First, as to the rendering of metaphor. Words like "horn," "mountain," "bowels," so frequently found in the English translations, ought to have been rendered either by appropriate English metaphors or by words representing the ideas. Second, as to the supplying of the various parts of the verb "to be." There were some six passages* similar in structure in the New Testament, where the copula was omitted in the Greek. They consisted of a subject followed by two attributes connected by *καὶ*. The revisers had inserted the copula in all the instances save one. Thus: "All things *are* naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do," and so with all the others save one, which was thus rendered: "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable." This rendering was simply bad grammar, and even nonsense. Scripture (*γραφή*) meant what was contained in the Old and New Testaments and nothing more nor less. But the assertion that anything was "ALSO useful" implied a *previous* assertion, and this the revisers had suppressed. Why were they not consistent in translating the first passage, "All naked things are also laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do"? Why did they confine themselves to the omission of the copula in only one of the six instances? Because they had a certain motive which can be easily guessed.

The Rev. J. THOMAS, in expressing his high appreciation of the paper, desired to put in a plea for accepting thankfully, under certain circumstances, translations made into classic forms. Reference had been made to the "Chinese language." There is no such thing as "the Chinese language." In Europe there are more than eighty different languages. It would be a linguistic miracle if China, which is one-third as large again, only spoke one. Classical Chinese was a script, not a vernacular, and by rendering the Scriptures into Classical Chinese, they gave it to all the *literati* of

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* Romans vii, 12; I Corinthians xi, 30; II Timothy iii, 16; Hebrews iv, 13; II Corinthians x, 10; I Timothy i, 15.

China. It was therefore of the greatest possible service, and it was understood by all scholars in Korea and Japan; the Korean scholar would read Classical Chinese, but would turn with scorn from the Korean vulgar tongue.

The Rev. GRAHAM BARTON had listened with the utmost pleasure to a most informing paper. There were, however, three points which he should have liked to have been emphasized. First, the necessity of the Bible translation being impersonal. Next, that ambiguous renderings should be avoided. Third, the danger of giving a sectarian tendency to the translation. Reference had already been made to Wycliffe and Tyndale; Wycliffe systematically used the word "penance," whereas Tyndale, being a Protestant Reformer, used the word "repentance."

Was it possible that all thought could be reduced to the simple language of the people? Some thoughts could only be rendered by the thinker himself; many idioms were untranslatable.

The LECTURER, in reply, said that it was not often that a writer could enjoy the privilege of hearing his work criticized (and that so favourably) by men at whose feet he would be ready to sit as a learner.

Nevertheless, as the principles that he put forward had not been attacked, he felt inclined to adhere to them, and, so far as that adherence justified him, to remain "of the same opinion still." For example, with all deference to the great authority of Professor Margoliouth, he ventured to think that the introduction of the word "torso" into a translation of Aristotle, if the idea was not inherent in the Greek phrase translated, was not in accordance with true principles of translation, and he felt certain that, even if the Professor thought such a liberty permissible in a translation of Aristotle, he would hesitate in taking it in a translation of the Bible.

To Dr. Kilgour, with his great authority as himself a translator of the Bible, and completely conversant with the work of so many other translators, he would not venture to reply, but would leave what he had written to be judged in the light of Dr. Kilgour's criticisms.

With respect to Mr. Dick's comment, he would only say that he thought the principle he had laid down met the case cited. If, to those acquainted with Hebrew, the words "horn" and "mountain"

had necessarily a metaphorical meaning, the translator was at liberty to let that appear in the translation of the particular passage in which that was the case; but if they had not, he was not. The business of the translator was to put the reader as nearly as possible in the position of a man who understood the original *language.*

He had been much interested by the remarks of Mr. Thomas on Classical Chinese. Mr. Thomas said that Chinese scholars simply would not look at a book unless it was written in Classical Chinese. His contention was the Bible used in public worship should be in the language of the common people, and that the Bible used in public worship must be the standard translation, whatever subsidiary versions might be made for other classes of readers.

He had not quite followed the questions that had been raised as to the possibility of mistakes. No principles could be laid down which would avoid any possibility of mistakes. If in Greek the copula was, in any phrase, inherent, and might therefore be either expressed or omitted, then the question of its insertion or omission in any translation must depend on the rules governing the language in which the translation was being made and must be decided by those having a competent knowledge of that language.

He returned his grateful thanks to the Meeting for their kind reception of his paper.

The Meeting adjourned at 6.10 p.m.