CHAPTER TEN

After King James

The Revised Text

THE PRINCIPAL DEFECT of the A.V. is one for which the translators cannot be held responsible. In the New Testament especially, the text which they used was an inferior one. The earliest printed editions of the Greek New Testament were based on later manuscripts—manuscripts which exhibit what textual critics know as the "Byzantine" type of Greek text. This Byzantine text-type represents a revision of the New Testament text made in the fourth century A.D. and later; it is farther removed from the text of the first century than certain earlier text-types which have been distinguished in more recent times. But throughout centuries of copying and recopying even the Byzantine text-type was no longer represented in its purity by the later manuscripts which were so largely drawn upon by the editors of the earliest printed texts. Erasmus did, indeed, ask a friend in Rome to consult on one particular point[1] the greatest biblical treasure of the Vatican Library—the Vatican Codex of the fourth century A.D.—although it was not until centuries later that the great value of this manuscript was appreciated.

The edition of the Greek Testament which became standard in England was one issued in 1550 by the Paris printer Estienne (Stephanus). The printing house of Elzevir in Leyden took this edition as the basis for two editions which they issued in 1624 and 1633. Their 1633 edition is noteworthy because the Latin preface assures the reader that here he has "the text which is now received by all" without either alteration or corruption. It is from this piece of "publisher's blurb" that the designation "The Received Text" (*Textus Receptus*) has been applied more generally to the text of the

[1] The particular point was the passage about the three heavenly witnesses (1 John 5 : 7, A.V.), which appears in no Greek manuscript apart from a few very late ones, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See pp. 141 f.

earliest printed editions of the Greek Testament, and in particular to the Greek text underlying the A.V. in the New Testament. Sometimes ignorance of the original circumstances of the designation leads people to appeal to the words "The Received Text" as though the very word *received* carried a certain weight of authority with it.

Better Manuscripts

Sixteen years after the publication of the A.V., King Charles I was presented by Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Alexandria, with a Greek manuscript of the Bible (the Old Testament part being in the Septuagint translation) which was older than any biblical manuscript previously available in the west. This fifth-century manuscript is known as the Alexandrine Codex, and is housed in the British Museum. Although nowadays its value is overshadowed by that of other biblical manuscripts, both earlier and better, it represented in those days a considerably more accurate text than that with which the A.V. translators had operated. Unfortunately it did not come to England in time for them to make use of it.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries much important work was done on the study of the New Testament text, and further manuscripts were either discovered (like the fourth-century Sinaitic Codex, discovered by Tischendorf in 1844) or made generally available (like the Vatican Codex, already referred to). It became increasingly clear that the A.V. required to be revised in order to be brought into closer conformity with the Greek text of the New Testament, as established by more intensive textual study on the basis of more reliable evidence than had been accessible in 1611.

Whitby, Wells, Mace, Whiston

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries several private ventures in Bible translation attempted to incorporate the results of the newer knowledge. Some of these were in the main revisions of the A.V.; others were more independent.

In 1703 Daniel Whitby's *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* included an explanatory expansion of the A.V. Whitby's chief claim to fame is his pioneering advocacy of the post-millennial interpretation of the biblical doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ.

Edward Wells produced a revised text of the A.V. in *The Common Translation Corrected* (1718–24); Daniel Mace in 1729 published anonymously a critical Greek text of the New Testament with the A.V. alongside it, corrected so as to be brought into line both with the accompanying Greek text and with current English usage. The vigour of his version may be illustrated by the following sample (James 3 : 5 f.):

> The tongue is but a small part of the body, yet how grand are its pretensions! a spark of fire! what quantities of timber will it blow into a flame! The tongue is a brand that sets the world in a combustion: it is but one of the numerous organs of the body, yet it can blast whole assemblies: tipped with infernal sulphur it sets the whole train of life in a blaze.

William Whiston, Sir Isaac Newton's successor at Cambridge and best known nowadays for his translation of Josephus, published his *Primitive New Testament* in 1745, when he was seventy-eight years old. This edition follows the A.V., except where it requires to be brought into line with those manuscripts which Whiston regarded as the most authentic—mainly manuscripts exhibiting what is now called the "Western Text" of the New Testament. For the Gospels and Acts he followed the Codex of Beza in the University Library at Cambridge—a bilingual manuscript (Greek and Latin) of the fifth or sixth century, to which he ascribed an impossible antiquity, dating it "within thirty years of the death of John the Apostle". Because he followed this codex, he added to Luke 6 : 5 in his version the peculiar Bezan incident:

> On the same day seeing one working on the sabbath, he said unto him, Man, if thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed: but if thou dost not know thou art cursed, and art a transgressor of the law.

Wesley's New Testament

In 1768 John Wesley issued a revised edition of the A.V., with notes "for plain, unlettered men who understand only their Mother Tongue". This revision was based on careful study of the Greek

original; there were some 12,000 alterations in all, but none of them, the reader is assured, for altering's sake. The English text is divided into sense-paragraphs, "a little circumstance which makes many passages more intelligible to the Reader".

A literary curio

A literary curio is Edward Harwood's *Liberal Translation of the New Testament: Being an Attempt to translate the Sacred Writings with the same Freedom, Spirit, and Elegance, with which other English Translations from the Greek Classics have lately been executed* (1768). Harwood was a classical and biblical scholar, whose *Introduction to the New Testament* procured him the D.D. degree from Edinburgh University. But his rendering of the New Testament into the idiom of Hume and Johnson was bound to have a very temporary and limited appeal. The opening words of the Lord's Prayer ("Our Father which art in heaven: Hallowed be thy name") appear as follows in his version:

> O Thou great governour and parent of universal nature—who manifestest thy glory to the blessed inhabitants of heaven—may all thy rational creatures in all the parts of thy boundless dominion be happy in the knowledge of thy existence and providence, and celebrate thy perfections in a manner most worthy thy nature and perfective of their own!

Septuagint translations

An English translation of the Old Testament from the Greek Septuagint was produced in 1808 by Charles Thomson, one of the founding fathers of the United States of America. It was republished in 1954 by the Falcon's Wing Press of Indian Hills, Colorado. Another translation of the Septuagint, by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, Bart., which appeared in 1844, is printed by Messrs Bagster of London alongside their edition of the Septuagint text itself.

Samuel Sharpe

Samuel Sharpe, a Unitarian scholar, issued in 1840 his *New Testament, translated from the Greek of J. J. Griesbach*; this was essentially

a revision of the A.V. in the light of Griesbach's critical Greek text. Sharpe's *Hebrew Scriptures Translated*—a revision of the A.V. of the Old Testament—followed in 1865.

Jewish Versions

Two Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible call for honourable mention at this point: Isaac Leeser's *The Law of God* (i.e. the Pentateuch, Philadelphia, 1845–46), followed by *The Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, 1854; revised edition, London, 1865); and A. Benisch's *Jewish School and Family Bible* (London, 1861).

Dean Alford's New Testament

Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury, who is chiefly memorable for his magnificent edition of the Greek New Testament with a copious commentary, issued a revision of the A.V. of the New Testament in 1869. This scholarly work was intended merely as an "interim report" pending the appearance of an authoritative revision. "It is impossible, to say nothing more, that *one man's work* can ever fulfil the requisites for an accepted Version of the Scriptures." Alford expressed the hope that his work might speedily be rendered useless by the setting up of a Royal Commission to revise the A.V. His prayer was answered in 1870—not, indeed, by the setting up of a Royal Commission, but by the action of Convocation of Canterbury. In his preface he showed himself a true prophet by warning the reader of some criticisms of his version which were sure to be made; they were destined to be made even more vociferously against the Revised Version of 1881 and 1885, and later against the Revised Standard Version of 1946 and 1952. Many of these criticisms, said Alford, would arise from failure to consider that changes were made "simply as an act of honest obedience to truth of testimony, or truth of rendering." It had never dawned on those who made such criticisms "that a translator of Holy Scripture must be absolutely colourless; ready to sacrifice the choicest text, and the plainest proof of doctrine, if the words are not those of what he is constrained in his conscience to receive as God's testimony."

J. N. Darby

Another private version which embodies the results of the new textual knowledge available in the second half of the nineteenth century is John Nelson Darby's *New Translation* (New Testament, second and revised edition, 1871; Old Testament, 1890). Darby, one of the leaders of the Brethren movement, translated the Bible into German (the Elberfeld version) and French (the Pau version) before his English version appeared; indeed, his English version was left incomplete when he died in 1882 and was completed on the basis of his German and French versions. In the New Testament especially it is based on a sound critical appraisal of the evidence, and was consulted by the company which prepared the Revised New Testament of 1881. The version was equipped with a full critical apparatus at the foot of each column of the New Testament which set forth in detail the evidence on which particular readings and renderings were adopted. The version, however, falls short in regard to English style —which would surprise no one acquainted with Darby's voluminous prose writings. (He also produced an Italian version of the New Testament.)

Young's Literal Translation

Some versions and editions of the Bible which appeared in the nineteenth century were designed to put the English reader as far as possible on a level with the reader of the Hebrew and Greek texts. Such a work was Robert Young's *Literal Translation of the Bible* (1862). Young, best known for his valuable *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, was an Edinburgh bookseller with an insatiable appetite for the mastery of eastern languages, ancient and modern (among his minor works is a translation of the books of Chronicles into Gujarati). His *Literal Translation* is practically a word-for-word rendering of the original texts into English, but in the Old Testament it is largely vitiated by an eccentric theory about the tenses of the Hebrew verb. The impression one gets from Young's translation with regard to Naaman the Syrian's compromising behaviour in the house of Rimmon is quite different from that given by other versions:

> For this thing Jehovah be propitious to thy servant, in the coming in of my lord into the house of Rimmon to bow himself

> there, and he was supported by my hand, and I bowed myself *in* the house of Rimmon; for my bowing myself in the house of Rimmon Jehovah be propitious, I pray thee, to thy servant in this thing (2 Kings 5 : 18).

Here Naaman is made to beg pardon for his previous idolatrous conduct, instead of his "going through the motions" of Rimmon-worship in the future when he accompanies his royal master to the temple of Rimmon in his capacity as national commander-in-chief.

Rotherham's Emphasized Version

Then there is *The Emphasized Bible* by Joseph Bryant Rotherham, of which the New Testament part first appeared in 1872 and the Old Testament in 1897–1902. This is a fairly literal translation by a man who knew his Hebrew and Greek texts thoroughly. The first two editions of the New Testament were based on Tregelles's text, the third on Westcott and Hort's. Rotherham's English text is set out and supplied with various signs in such a way as to convey the most detailed shades of emphasis in the original; hence the title of his version. To say that "Rotherham's interest was rather that of an elocutionist than that of a translator"[1] is scarcely accurate; both interests are simultaneously evident. His version is one of the first to render the ineffable name of the God of Israel throughout the Old Testament by "Yahweh".

The Newberry Bible

The Englishman's Bible, edited by Thomas Newberry (New Testament, 1870; complete Bible, 1884, and several later editions), is not a new version but the text of the A.V., arranged by means of distinctive type and a whole battery of dots, dashes, marginal notes and so forth, so as to give the English reader information about the tenses of the Hebrew and Greek verbs, the divine names, and many other grammatical and linguistic details. The New Testament is equipped with a critical apparatus exhibiting variant readings. Newberry had no axe to grind. He was a careful and completely unpretentious student of the Hebrew and Greek texts, whose

[1] H. Pope, *English Versions of the Bible* (St. Louis and London, 1952), p. 546.

one aim was to make the fruit of his study available as far as possible to Bible students whose only language was English. His procedure tended to make the biblical text self-explanatory as far as possible; he had no thought of imposing on it an interpretative scheme of his own.

Other Nineteenth-Century Versions

In 1885 there appeared *A Translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from the Original Hebrew*, by Helen Spurrell, based on an unpointed text. Other nineteenth-century translations of parts of the Bible were included in commentaries on biblical books and similar works. One of the best-known examples may be found in the version of Paul's epistles included in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, by W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson (1864). It must be borne in mind that much excellent Bible translation is to be found, down to the present day, embedded in commentaries on various books of the Bible. For example, the new series of New Testament commentaries which is being published by A. and C. Black in London and by Harper and Brothers in New York presents fresh translations of the books as well as commentaries on them.