

THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—FORTHCOMING VERSION OF THE BIBLE.

AMONGST the many aids by which modern scholarship and the progress of science have enabled us more clearly to discern our duty, and in many instances more efficiently to perform it, one of signal importance and incalculable value is promised during the ensuing year. The excellences of our English version of the Word of God cannot be too warmly or too gratefully acknowledged. It was the successor and the rival of several admirable translations, some of which had just claims, and were strong in possession; and yet, without either external or moral coercion, by the force of its own merits it displaced them. Our Church lost, indeed, many of her children, but they all took their mother's Bible with them, and taking that they were not wholly lost to her. Securing gradually the confidence of the scholar, it speedily won the love of the people. The style in vogue amongst men of letters in the days of Elizabeth and James was faulty and pedantic. But the religious discussions which followed the Reformation had called forth what has been happily termed a "consecrated diction," simple and direct, yet pure and dignified. Whilst glorifying God, it ennobled the tongue of the worshipper, and by its innate inspiration it elevated the whole tone of English literature. If I quote the words of one who unhappily deserted the Church of England,¹ it is only that I may adduce the confession even of an unfriendly witness in its favour—"Who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvellous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country? It lives on the ear, like music that cannot be forgotten; like the sound of

¹ The Rev. Frederick W. Faber.

Church bells, which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities seem often to be almost things rather than words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of national seriousness. . . . The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of a man are hid beneath its words. . . . It is his sacred thing, which doubt has never dimmed and controversy never soiled." Such being the confessed distinctions of our English Bible, it is obvious that they have rendered a new translation, as a substitute for something decaying and ready to vanish away, impossible: for it retains in itself more of freshness and vitality than anything which has sought to supplant it. But they by no means preclude a revision of it, which is happily now as practicable as it is necessary. Our version is itself a revision of revisions, and its history has revealed the path towards perfection. "Truly," said the translators, "we never thought, from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one; but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one." Their example it has seemed good to our Church to follow.

Nine years ago a committee of eminent Biblical scholars was constructed for the revision of the Version of 1611, with power to add to its number learned members of other Christian denominations, by whom the Authorised Version was accepted, both in this and other lands. During their labours 101 able and eminent men have been engaged upon the work, of whom by death or resignation 22 have been lost, but 79 are still actively pursuing their patient task. Amongst those who were removed to the world of perfect knowledge were Bishops Thirlwall and Wilberforce, Dean Alford, Professors Fairbairn, of Glasgow, and Hodge, of Princeton. Amongst those who are still spared to mature the great work are men whose reputation will earn the confidence of all—Harold Browne, Ollivant, Ellicott, Moberly, Westcott, Scrivener, and Lightfoot. It is expected that the revised New Testament, at least, and possibly also parts of the Old Testament, will be published in 1880, just 500 years since Wycliffe issued the first complete version of the Holy Scriptures in the English language. An interesting account of the work now being accomplished by the Revisers has been published during the present year by Dr. Schaff, the well-known Professor of Theology in the Union Theological Seminary of New York. It consists of Papers upon different sections and aspects of the work, contributed by members of the American Revision Committee. And although the suggestions and statements respecting any particular changes are only made on the authority of the individual writer, yet as these have been

the subject of correspondence during nine years between the Committees, they possess an interest far beyond that which would attach to the speculations of any individual, however eminent in scholarship or position. It is, however, very perceptible that, so far as the New Testament Scriptures are concerned, one great mind has exercised a commanding, yet well-merited, influence upon the deliberations of the revisers. The alterations and emendations foreshadowed by the American scholars are for the most part identical with those which were issued in 1871 by the then Hulsean Professor of Divinity, Dr. Lightfoot, who has recently been promoted to the See of Durham. It is a happy augury that a mind so eminently candid, and a scholarship so extensive and accurate, should have been accepted by men of different denominations and of varying attainments, as worthy and able to moderate in the conflicts of opinion inseparable from free and honest discussion.

With respect to the expediency of revising both the original texts and the English version of the Scriptures, no one can doubt the absolute necessity of our attaining to the closest possible accuracy in our rendering of the words of everlasting life. Many of the errors of our day originated in faulty deductions from passages ambiguously or imperfectly worded. And when once a theory had thus been adopted, the Bible was searched with a prejudiced eye, to discover perforce corroborations of erroneous conceptions. Plymouthism is a conspicuous example of this evil. In other cases doctrines which were themselves soundly deduced from passages of undoubted authority have been unnecessarily buttressed by supports, which criticism has shown to be defective. And the truth has been discredited by the exposed failure of accretions which were really extraneous to it. Divergencies between Christians have been aggravated by appeals to statements apparently contradictory, but in the truth of the original consistent with each other. And the spiritual growth of many a pious soul has been checked by mistaken interpretation of phrases which describe experimental religion, or has been stimulated to more than a true sobriety of development by words too warmly rendered, or to which modern usage has attached an advanced meaning. In the interests, then, of substantial unity, of sound and sober theology, and, above all, of clear knowledge of ourselves and of our God, an accurate revision, adhering as closely as honesty would permit to the existing version, and yet faithfully correcting its errors and supplying its defects, had become a primary necessity of our times.

And, in the merciful Providence of God, there was a singular concurrence of modern facilities for the task. In the Old Testament, indeed, the laborious collations of Hebrew manu-

scripts have done little more than establish the substantial correctness of the received Masoretic text; whilst the long discussion respecting the Hebrew vowels has resulted in proving, if not their originality, at least their accuracy. But whilst the text will remain almost wholly unaltered, it must be remembered that Hebrew studies have made vast advances since 1611, and that the entire science of comparative Semitic philology has been developed since that time. The Buxtorfs, father and son, whose labours represented the first stage of scholarly investigation into the structure of Hebrew, had only just published their works in 1609. But since their day a long list of lexicographers, grammarians, and commentators, have discussed every word of the Sacred text. Palestine has been thoroughly surveyed: its topography, its archæology, its natural history have been exhaustively explored by diligent students; and the monuments of Assyria and of Egypt have been exhumed. The value of the versions which our translators collated, and of the commentaries which they consulted, has also been accurately gauged. And whilst the former, and especially those in "Spanish, French, Italian, or Dutch," to which they refer, are now held to be worthy of little credit, the commentaries which, with the exception of the Rabbinic Expositions, were the work of men generally unacquainted with Hebrew, cannot now be trusted for the solution of a linguistic difficulty, without the safeguard which modern scholarship supplies.

In the case of the New Testament the necessity for revision arises not only from its intrinsic importance as the Revelation and Charter of the Gospel Dispensation, but also from the fact that its text has required very careful recension before the attempt to clothe it in English could be made. Three of the principal editions of the Greek Testament which influenced, directly or indirectly, the text of the Authorised Version, may be traced to that of Erasmus, issued in 1527. But to him there were available for the Gospels only a manuscript of the fifteenth century, and one of the thirteenth or fourteenth century for the Acts and the Epistles. In the Revelation his manuscript was so imperfect that he was compelled to supply some of its defects by translating from the Latin Vulgate into Greek. It is not too much to say that in more than a thousand instances fidelity to the true text now ascertained requires a change in the common version, although in most cases the change would be slight. Modern research, however, has, by God's guidance, brought to light manuscripts more or less complete, ranging from the fourth to the tenth century, including twenty-seven of the Gospels, ten of the Acts and Catholic Epistles, and eleven of the Epistles of St. Paul. The Old Latin, the Syriac, and the Coptic translations, of the second and third centuries, were unknown to our trans-

lators; and it is but recently that the Church has been instructed by the labours of Griesbach, Tischendorf, and Tregelles. We are confident, therefore, that the recension of the text will be conducted efficiently and faithfully. When an important reading is clearly a mistake of the copyists, it will be discarded; when it is uncertain its doubtfulness will be stated in the margin; and the unskilled reader will inherit the wisdom of the ablest scholars of the day, and not least amongst them, of that master of textual criticism, the present Bishop of Durham. And we are assured, on the authority of Professor Westcott, "that in no parallel case have the readings of the original texts to be translated been discussed and determined with equal care, thoroughness, and candour."

The advantages to be anticipated from greater accuracy in the translation of the New Testament are, that obscure and involved passages will be made plain; that the course of many an argument will be freed from perplexing impediments; that the Bible will be liberated from the imputation of being in certain places inconsequential and illogical; and that, whilst no doctrine defined in our Articles or fairly deducible from our Liturgy will lose its support, many will be found to derive strong confirmation from passages hitherto misapprehended. Precision in rendering the force of the Article; in defining the inflexions of the verb and the delicate exactness of its tenses; in marking the true intention of the prepositions; and in correcting some unquestionable mistranslations, will tend powerfully to stamp the volume as having been inspired by One who cannot lie, and will not contradict Himself.

We may also expect much assistance from a greater observance of verbal identity. The translators of 1611 remark, in their address to the reader, "We have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing or to an identity of words. That we should express the same notion in the same particular word, as, for example, if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word once by *purpose*, never to call it *intent* thus to mince the matter we thought to savour more of curiosity than of wisdom." This, however, was an unhappy decision. In a volume which is recognised as a supreme authority by all Christians, whilst varied renderings of a word may involve the introduction of new doctrine, the translation by one and the same expression of words which differ in the original tends to confound things that differ. The English reader suffers great inconvenience from such variations, and from such apparent but not real correspondences. He finds, for instance, in one passage the word "Atonement;" and so far as he can discover it occurs nowhere else. But a correct translation would have enabled him to recognise the term made familiar elsewhere as "Reconciliation."

He investigates the nature of Scriptural "hope," and he is baffled by the fact that eighteen times out of thirty-two the translators have rendered the verb by "trust," thus virtually confounding the first two of the triad of Christian graces. It is scarcely necessary to recall the unfortunate result of the varied renderings of the same word in the verse "These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment, but the righteous into life *eternal*;" or of the confusion occasioned by translating "Hades" and "Gehenna" identically in every instance except one. We all recognise the vital importance of St. Paul's teaching that "faith is reckoned for righteousness." Yet the proof text from the Old Testament upon which he bases the doctrine is given differently in our translation on each occasion of his quoting it. And the verb itself, which is one of his technical theological terms, and which constitutes the very warp of his great argument, receives three different renderings in its eleven occurrences within the compass of twenty-two verses. It is true that sense is infinitely more important than sound, and that the context may modify by varying shades the meaning of a well-known word. But none assuredly will doubt the obligation to make the Word of Life so plain, so vivid, so consistent with itself, that not only may the scholar trust it as "the man of his counsel," but that the "way-faring man," though unlearned, may cease "to err therein." Moreover, the challenge uttered to every intelligent man by the issue of the new revision will compel a revival both social and private of the study of the Holy Scriptures, which, if pondered by the proffered light of the Holy Spirit, and explored by the God-given clue of faith in Christ Jesus, are able to make us wise unto salvation.

EDWARD PREST.



ART. II.—THE CHURCH IN WALES.

THE Church in Wales received at the late Church Congress a large amount of attention; her past and present condition was ably discussed; her position was considered in its various aspects. Attention, however, was chiefly directed to her external history and outward condition. Her inner life was barely touched. The religious element at work within her was not explained; and until this explanation is forthcoming, the position which she occupies among the people cannot be understood. It is an essential factor in the solution of the problem. The purpose of my remarks is to attempt this explanation, and I shall take my start from the Reformation.