

THE WORK OF BIBLE REVISION IN GERMANY.

I.

HISTORIC PART.

ON the 19th May—the Tuesday before Whitsunday, and eve of the Jewish Pentecost—the result of the labours devoted to the revision of the Authorized Version of the Old Testament was given forth to the Christian public of England. Reviews of the whole work and of its several parts are now appearing in the theological journals. Under these circumstances, it will certainly be of interest for the readers of THE EXPOSITOR to be made acquainted with the kindred task undertaken in Germany, specially since this is now brought to a provisional close.

Our great Reformer began his work of translation in the year 1517 with the seven Penitential Psalms ; in September, 1522, the New Testament appeared ; in 1523, the Pentateuch ; 1524, the Historic books and the Hagiographa ; 1532, the Prophets ; 1534, the first edition of the whole Bible ; 1544-45, the eleventh and last edition published by himself.

Unquestionably Luther set great store by his work. See, *e.g.* the Preface to the Old Testament (1523), at the end:—

“ Now, too, the dirt will stick to the wheel, and even the rudest will think that he may master me and find fault with me here and there. Well, I take no notice of these things. I have well considered from the first that I should sooner meet with ten thousand who would find fault with my work, than *one* who should come up to me in the twentieth part of it,” etc.

And another time he writes (*Werke*, ed. Erlangen, vol. lxxv. p. 105):—

“ He who will not read it can let it alone. I will beseech

and pay court to no man. It is my Testament and my Interpretation, and must and shall remain so."

In adding these last words he had in view his opponents, who were guilty of making arbitrary changes in his work, and then putting it forth under their own name, in order to damage his reputation. Such people as that Hieronymus Emser, the "dauber in Dresden," who in 1523 published a lampoon, entitled, "On what ground and cause Luther's interpretation . . . is reasonably interdicted to the common man" (Leipz. 4to), and then, in 1527, issued Luther's New Testament, with slight alterations (Dresden, fol.), under his own name. Luther himself, on another occasion, declared, "If it should be necessary to assail and find fault with me as having sometimes erred in the interpretation, I will accept it with thanks; for how often did Jerome err!" And this same Luther wrought indefatigably to his life's end on the perfecting of his great work of translation: for the seventh edition (1541) he mustered a whole "Synedrion" (Melanchthon, Aurogallus, Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, Cruciger, and even those scholars who were only making a passing stay in Wittenberg), which held its regular sittings several times in the week. Yea, even a short time before his death he expressed his intention of once more going over the Bible, and bringing it out in a more perfect form. Augustus Herm. Francke was thus doubtless right in his conviction, that those who laboured to improve Luther's Version were acting according to the mind of Luther.

After Luther's death his work did not remain unchanged. Even the edition of the year 1546, brought out under the oversight of his *Corrector* Georg Rörer, shows many a deviation from that of the year, 1545—deviations which certainly do not proceed from the hand of Luther. Many other changes were made on the part of those who had charge of the subsequent editions; so that the Elector

Augustus of Saxony felt compelled to ordain that the text for the Lutheran Church should be conformed to the edition of 1545 (ed. Wittenberg 1581, fol.).

Towards the close of the seventeenth century endeavours after improvement began to be made on two different sides. A. H. Francke, the renowned founder of the Halle Orphanage, published (in the year 1695) his *Observationes Biblicæ, oder Anmerkungen über einige Oerter H. Schrift, . . . wo man dem eigentlichen Wortverstande näher kommen könne*. Although he expressed himself regarding the value of Luther's translation in words of warmest appreciation, he nevertheless encountered intense and violent opposition. Notably the fanatical Joh. Ferd. Mayer (Hamburg, 1695) made a passionate attack upon Francke, who in his rejoinder could point out that even before his time Luther's version had been corrected in more than three hundred places by theologians of note.

The work of Dr. Diekmann, General-Superintendent in Stade, though confined within narrower limits, was not without practical result. He brought out in 1690, 1698, and 1703, highly valued editions of the Bible. His endeavour was directed to the purging of the German text from numerous misprints and other errors, and selecting the best from the different readings of the editions accessible to him. How many errors had crept in within a little more than a century after Luther's death, owing to the lack of any central authority or Bible Society to superintend the printing of the German Bible, may be inferred from a single example; the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg observes in the Preface to the edition issued by this body in 1661, that the said faculty had noticed more than a thousand errors in the editions current.

Baron Hildebrand von Canstein took as the basis for his first edition of the Bible, appearing in 1713, the Stade Bible of the year 1703; yet in such wise that he compared earlier

editions also, which Diekmann had not at hand, and adopted a number of emendations made directly from the original text.¹

Partly the moderately conservative procedure of Canstein and his successors, partly the great circulation which the Bibles printed in Halle had met with before the rise of other Societies, was the reason why the text diffused by the Canstein Bible Institute was more or less regarded and employed as the regulative *textus receptus*, by the British and Foreign Bible Society, the leading Prussian Bible Society, etc. Nevertheless the variations in the editions of the German Bible became more and more numerous first, because changes had been repeatedly made in the Canstein editions (notably in modernising the form of expression); and secondly, because the Bible Societies, to some extent at least, were guided by different principles.

In order to put an end to the uncertainty and confusion thus constantly arising, it was before all necessary to prepare a critically scientific foundation for further labour. To this end the University Librarian, Dr. Heinrich Ernst Bindseil, and the Director of the Canstein Bible Institute, Dr. Herm. Agathon Niemeyer, combined in 1836 for an arduous undertaking, which, owing to the ill health of the last named, was carried through by Bindseil alone. The work appeared in seven volumes, Halle, 1845–1855, with the title, *Dr. Martin Luther's Bibelübersetzung nach der letzten Original-Ausgabe kritisch bearbeitet*. Beneath the text are furnished the different readings of the other editions, whether of the whole Bible or of single parts, published under Luther's own oversight; further, the most important variations in the original text and earliest versions, as

¹ See C. H. Chr. Plath, *Carl Hildebrand Freiherr von Canstein*, Halle, 1861, p. 87 sqq.; O. Bertram, *Gesch. der Cansteinschen Bibel-anstalt*, Halle, 1863, p. 60 sqq.; C. Mönckeberg, *Beiträge zur würdigen Herstellung des Textes der Lutherischen Bibel-Uebersetzung*, Hamb., 1855, p. 19 sqq.

gathered from editions and manuscripts. This work rendered very important service in connexion with the labour of Bible revision presently to be discussed.

Before Bindseil's work had as yet been completed, the Hamburg Pastor, C. Mönckeberg, had in two publications laid stress upon the necessity for constituting a normal edition of the German Bible, employing to this end the early editions and, in case of errors affecting the sense, likewise the original text.¹

On the 21st September, 1857, a resolution was passed at a Conference of representatives of different German Bible Institutions, that "the Canstein Bible Society should be called upon to take in hand the work of revision."

The Halle Bible Institute, while not disguising the difficulty of the task, set to work with a joyful confidence. It was recognised that in the present state of science a division of the labour on its theologico-critical and its linguistic side would be a necessity. Pastor Mönckeberg undertook the preparation of the theologico-critical part of the work of revision. In the pamphlet, *Vorschläge zur Revision von Dr. Martin Luther's Bibelübersetzung*, erstes Heft (Halle, 1861; pp. 70), he divides into three classes the passages in which he counts an alteration in the ordinary editions desirable: (1) 38 passages in which a misprint occurring in the editions published during Luther's life is to be amended, or the edition of 1545 is to be restored; (2) 169 passages in which an earlier rendering of Luther is preferable to that of 1545; (3) 75 passages which call for alteration, because the rendering is entirely unintelligible or decidedly wrong. Dr. Karl Frommann in Nuremberg, aided by the counsel of the well known Germanist, Prof. Rudolf von Raumer, undertook the linguistic part of the

¹ See, (1) *Beiträge zur würdigen Herstellung*, etc., mentioned in preceding note; (2) *Zeitschrift f. christl. Wissensch. u. christl. Leben*, 1855, vol. vi Nos. 9, 10.

work of revision. Two years later than Mönckeberg he (Frommann) issued the publication, embodying the results of very diligent study, *Vorschläge zur Revision von Dr. Martin Luther's Bibelübersetzung*, zweites Heft (Halle, 1862; pp. 87). Of the "Principles for the linguistic treatment of Luther's Bible text" (*ll.*, p. 2 sqq.) the following may be given here. After having said that the practical object must needs exert an essential influence upon the character of the work, it goes on to say: § 2. "In connexion with the formation of a practically serviceable text of the Bible, the religious need and the requirements of the school occupy the first line." § 3. "The requirement of the school demands that the understanding of the Bible should not be rendered needlessly difficult. The school must wish that the main reading book of the people should adapt itself to the language which the school has to teach and inculcate for written composition." § 4. "On the other hand, the character of the earliest text must not be sacrificed to these demands. For the force and beauty of the language gives to Luther's Bible its inestimable value, likewise for Church and school." § 15. "One need not fear giving the Word of God too much of an everyday character, in adopting the phraseology of the present. Not only its subject matter, but also the indestructible character of Luther's rendering, will always impress it with the stamp of the extraordinary. On the other side, however, we are not to expect the language of the Prophets and Apostles to differ in nothing from the ordinary forms of trivial discourse."

In the year 1863 the Eisenach Church Conference,¹ which at the wish of the Bible Societies had interested itself in behalf of the matter, passed the following resolution, of importance for the progress of the work:—

"1. The Conference deems it advisable to start in general from the

¹ A conference of representatives of the highest ecclesiastical authorities of Protestant Germany, since 1852 ordinarily convened every two years.

present text of the Canstein Bible as the basis, with special consultation of the editions published during the lifetime of Dr. M. Luther, particularly the edition to which he put the last hand; yet without on that account recurring to those linguistic forms of the early editions which have become quite foreign to our age. 2. Further, the different readings of the various Bible Societies which are now current are to be consulted, in such a way that the unity of the text-form shall be sought by the universal appropriation of the better reading; in suchwise truly that in case of doubt as to which of these readings is to be chosen, the original text shall decide it. 3. Moreover, the comparatively few passages, in the first place of the New Testament, whose alteration, in other words correction, might appear necessary and unobjectionable [!] in the interest of the understanding of Scripture, are to be restored in a manner faithfully according with the sense. 4. The Evangelical Conference will request of the various ecclesiastical administrations whom it may concern, to be helpful to the Bible Societies in doing so, particularly as regards the facilitating of mutual negotiations, the according of theological assistance, etc."

In virtue of this resolution, the following ten theologians were commissioned by their respective ecclesiastical authorities to enter upon the revision, in the first place, of the New Testament:—Nitzsch and Twesten in Berlin, Benschlag and Riehm in Halle (for Prussia); Ahlfeld and Brückner in Leipsic (Saxony); Meyer and Niemann in Hanover; Fronmüller and Schroeder (Württemberg). For the consultations the principle was laid down, that new alterations in accordance with the original text should be adopted only upon a majority of two-thirds, while the selection among the existing readings of the various editions of the German Bible should be made upon a simple plurality of votes. In the year 1867 the whole revised text of the New Testament, with the linguistic revision as superintended by Dr. Frommann, appeared in the book-shops. Ecclesiastical authorities, Bible Societies, and single individuals sent in manifold, in part feasible, expressions of their judgment. These judgments were tested by the Commission of Revisers: 20th–25th April, 1868. Then, after the Eisenach Conference had assented to the results of the deliberations, the revised

text of the New Testament was printed in a new edition (32mo) by the Canstein Bible Society, in the year 1870. The emendations in Luther's version were then also adopted in the editions of other Bible Societies (*e.g.* the Stuttgart Bible Society, the Prussian Haupt-bibelgesellschaft, with few exceptions also of the British and Foreign Bible Society).

In the year 1870 the Eisenach Conference also resolved to enter upon the more comprehensive and difficult work of revising the translation of the Old Testament. On the 13th April, 1871, the Committee of Revision met for the first time. It consisted of seventeen members; namely, eight for Prussia (including Hanover), four for Saxony, three for Würtemberg, two for Saxe-Weimar. In eighteen sessions, of which ordinarily one was held in the spring and one in the autumn, or in a total of two hundred and twenty-four sittings (of which twenty-three were devoted to the Apocrypha), and numerous sittings of sub-committees, the work of revising was completed by the autumn of 1881. The fifteen revisers who still took part at the ending of the work were: Riehm and Schlottmann in Halle, Bertheau in Göttingen, Düsterdieck in Hanover, Clausen in Brügge near Kiel, Hoffmann in Frauendorf near Stettin—for Prussia; Baur and Delitzsch in Leipsic, Kühne in Dresden—for Saxony; Kübel in Tübingen, Schroeder in Cannstatt, Kapff in Balingen—for Würtemberg; Grimm in Jena—for Saxe-Weimar. The very arduous and responsible task of drawing up the results of the deliberations was undertaken by Pastor Schroeder. The parallel passages and the superscriptions of the chapters were revised by the Committee of the Stuttgart Bible Institution; which was aided by the reports of Prof. Kübel in Tübingen, and Dean Schmoller in Derendingen. The "Index for the explanation of antiquated and little known words" was remodelled by Prof. Riehm in Halle.

In November, 1883, the revised Bible appeared, under the title: "Die Bibel oder die ganze heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments, nach der deutschen Uebersetzung D. Martin Luthers. Erster Abdruck der im Auftrage der Eisenacher deutschen evangelischen Kirchenkonferenz revidierten Bibel. (Sogenannte Probebibel.) Halle a. S., Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses."

On the outward arrangement of this edition be it here only remarked, that all corrections of the rendering are brought into relief by distinctive type; those passages in which there has been a return from the Canstein text to Luther's text have been indicated by two vertical lines (| |) in addition to the distinctive type.

The Proof Bible is prefaced by two historic notices; one (pp. 24) by the Canstein Bible Institution, the second (pp. 38) by Pastor Schroeder.

In addition, the following writings in further illustration of the work were issued by members of the Commission for revising:

Ed. Riehm, *Das erste Buch Mose nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Dr. Martin Luthers in revidirtem Text mit Vorbemerkungen und Erläuterungen.* Halle, 1873; pp. 144.

K. F. Schröder, *Die Psalmen nach der deutschen Uebersetzung. Dr. M. L. in revidirtem Text mit Erläuterungen.* Halle, 1876; pp. 196.

Ed. Riehm, *Zur Revision der Lutherbibel. Über die Messianischen Stellen des A.T.* Halle, 1882; pp. 31.

E. Kühn, *Ezechiels Gesicht vom Tempel der Vollendungszeit.* Gotha, 1882; pp. 92.

W. Grimm, "Luthers Uebersetzung der Apokryphen" (in *Theol. Stud. u. Krit.*, 1883).

Fr. Düsterdieck, *Die Revision der Luth. Bibelübersetzung.* Hanover, 1882; pp. 58.

E. Kühn, *Die Revision der Luth. Bibelübersetzung.* Halle, 1883; pp. 64.

P. Kleinert, *Die Revidierte Lutherbibel*. Heidelb., 1883; pp. 37.

W. Grimm, *Kurzgefasste Gesch. der lutherischen Bibelübersetzung*. Jena, 1884; pp. 86.

Franz Delitzsch, *Die revidierte Lutherbibel. Appell an die lutherische Kirche*. Leipzig, 1884; pp. 28.

K. Schlottmann, *Wider Kliefoth u. Luthardt. In Sachen der Lutherbibel*. Halle, 1885; pp. 105.

For the just appreciation of the work of revision the little work also of Theod. Schott, *D. Martin Luther und Die deutsche Bibel*, 3 Aufl., Stuttgart, 1883; pp. 48, will be found useful.

In the following (concluding) article I will mention the writings of others, directed to the criticising of the Proof Bible, and will endeavour to explain with all possible brevity the excellences and defects of the work of revision.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

IX.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN ITS THEME, METHODS AND AIM.

“Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ; whereunto I labour also, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.”—Col. i. 28, 29 (Rev. Ver.).

THE false teachers at Colossæ had a great deal to say about a higher wisdom reserved for the initiated. They apparently treated the Apostolic teaching as trivial rudiments, which might be good for the vulgar crowd, but were known by the possessors of this higher truth to be only a veil for it. They had their initiated class, to whom their mysteries were entrusted in whispers.