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THE ENGLISH BIBLE 1611-1961
SOME LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS

On March 4, 1961, a new translation of the New Testament into English was published simultaneously by the two ancient university presses of Oxford and Cambridge. It appeared with such a blaze of publicity that the *Times Literary Supplement* sarcastically proposed that the new Bible, of which this was the first instalment, should be known as the Advertised Version. There is no doubt about its impact on the public mind. On the day of publication queues began to form well before the bookshops opened; booksellers soon reported gleefully that its sales were comparable with those of *Lady Chatterley's Lover;* and within less than four months more than 2 ½ million copies had been sold.

Such a wave of public interest in a new version of Scripture is in itself very remarkable. It is not unprecedented, however; and it may be held as significant rather of curiosity about the new version than of approval of it. It is worth recalling that something very similar happened in 1881 when a Revised Version of the classic English Bible of 1611 was published. It was, as its name showed, merely a revision of the familiar text, whose style it aimed, not very successfully, at preserving. Then, in 1881, a similar rush occurred. It is said that over a million copies were sold in the first 24 hours; and the entire text of the New Testament was telegraphed to America and appeared as a supplement to a Chicago newspaper. Yet it must be added that the Revised Version never supplanted the old Bible either in public affection or in liturgical use, and the overwhelming majority of Bibles printed in English in the last 80 years have followed the older, unrevised text.

Modern English Translations

There have been, during the last 80 years, quite a number of translations of the Bible, or of parts of it, into modem English. I will here mention only the highly popular version of Dr. James MOFFATT, whose New Testament appeared in 1913, and a fine, though free, translation published since the war by J. B. PHILLIPS. Several of these are much more startling in their use of modernisms of speech than the New English Bible. Yet none of them have aroused the same intense popular interest, or provoked the same controversy, as the two I have mentioned. The reason for this is partly the impression that both of these modern versions are 'official,' authorised by the powers that be; and the feeling that they were or are intended, more or less, to supplant the Bible of 1611. This is not true, or only partly true, in the case of the new version; but I think that such an impression exists, and that it goes far

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to explain the unusual interest aroused by the undertaking. Behind the new Bible stands the immense and august form of the Authorized Version; and the reader's first feeling on opening the new book is to compare it, perhaps with a pleasurable excitement, perhaps with apprehension, perhaps with disgust, with its great prototype. I am speaking loosely, but I am trying to describe something that is itself fluid and irrational. Many Englishmen feel in their hearts that the Bible was written in English, and with the English in mind. One of the greatest of our writers, a man of prodigious learning, John MILTON, could say in all solemnity that when God has an important new idea to reveal to mankind, He imparts it, "as his manner is, first to his Englishmen." No doubt the idea could be paralleled in other countries. The French poet PEGUY wrote something very similar; but for him, of course, God required the French intellect to understand His meaning. A great many Englishmen have, I am sure, in the back of their minds the notion that the Bible is English, and that its traditional form is something essential to our heritage and almost to our Constitution. The idea that it might be supplanted by a radical modernisation is almost as offensive to them as it would be to suggest proclaiming Great Britain a republic. I am deliberately exaggerating; and I do so because I wish to convey to you some of the overtones that this question has for a majority of Englishmen.

It is indeed impossible to assess the importance of the new Bible without considering its great predecessor; and that is what I now propose to do. I must however digress for a moment from my subject which is the literary and stylistic importance of the two versions, in order to venture, with the greatest diffidence, into the religious field.

"Authorized" Versions

Both the Bible versions that I am considering are Protestant in origin. The Authorized Version was produced under royal authority, for the use of the established “Anglican” church; it was however accepted by the numerous and influential non-conformist bodies, and therefore became and remained until modern times the common Bible of the great majority of Englishmen. It was never accepted by the tiny minority of Catholics who continued to practise their religion, subject to various legal sanctions, during the next two centuries. They used a version produced by members of the exiled college at Douai in Flanders; and this remains, for English Catholics, the equivalent of the Anglican 'A. V.' Stylistically it is inferior to it; and its original form was still more so. The editions now in use present an important revision carried out during the 18th century by Bishop Challoner; and, perhaps because the reviser was himself a convert from the Church of England, the revision shows clearly the influence of the Authorized Version itself. In addition to this traditional version, the important Catholic community in modern England, largely of Irish descent, now has a complete new translation of the Bible, the work of one man, Monsignor R. KNOX. It is a

remarkable achievement, and although opinions are divided on its literary merit, it has been hailed by some critics as a classic of translation. It is, incidentally, one of the few modem translations made not from the original texts but from the Vulgate Latin. Its use is now very widespread; and its existence is one reason – no doubt there are others – why the Roman Catholic Church is not represented on the board of translators, representing all other Christian denominations in England, who are working on the New English Bible. This, then, is not a specifically Anglican undertaking, like the Authorized Version; but it is a common effort of all those Christian bodies for which the Authorized Version has become a common heritage.

Translation of the Authorized Version

Let us now take a closer look at this great translation itself. And in order to discuss its style intelligently, it is necessary to understand the circumstances under which it was produced, and the governing principles which directed the work. When Queen ELIZABETH I died, in 16O3, the crown of England passed to the son of Mary STUART, JAMES I, who had already been king of Scotland for 37 years. The new king, who took a great interest in religious affairs, promptly called a conference of churchmen at Hampton Court, in which among other things it was resolved that a new translation of the whole Bible should be made for use in all Churches of England in time of divine service. JAMES eagerly seized upon the proposal; and the work was duly organized and put in hand. Forty-seven men, working in six panels meeting it Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster, divided the Bible between them; and their draft was further edited by a smaller committee of twelve. The work of translation and revision took some seven years, years which might well be reckoned the culminating point in the history of English literature, for they also saw the creation of several of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies.

The result was made public in 1611. The title page bears the significant words: "newly translated out of the Original tongues, with the former translations diligently compared and revised, by His Majesty's special commandment. Appointed to be read in churches ". This merits attention on several grounds. The Bible was in fact produced by the king's express instructions, and he took a strong personal interest in the work; it is therefore not inappropriate that it should be generally known in America, although not in England, as King James' Version. Yet, in spite of its received name in England, it was never authorized, in the sense of being enforced, like the *Book of Common Prayer* by Act of Parliament. It was indeed “appointed to be read in churches”, but beyond that it was not given any special privilege.

Earlier English Translations

It was no doubt hoped, as it proved with reason, that its very excellence would gradually drive rival versions out of circulation. The reference to the "former translations" is highly significant; and indeed it expresses less than the truth. The translators did not only compare their work with the earlier versions; they were expressly instructed to use one of these as a basis, and it is easy to confirm by a comparison of the texts that they did so. And now one can construct an interesting pedigree or family tree which reveals much about the stylistic origin of the Authorized Version of 1611. The translation used as a basis was that known as the “Bishops' Bible”, which appeared in 1568. But the Bishops' Bible was itself based on the "Great Bible," as it was called, of 1539. The "Great Bible" again is based on a certain “Matthew's Bible” of -1537, and this in turn is a revision of Miles Coverdale's Bible, printed in I535. This, the first complete Bible printed in English, was probably printed in Cologne, for we are now in the period when Bible-translating was a questionable, and sometimes a dangerous, activity in England, and such men as COVERDALE had to pass much of their lives in exile. The version of the Psalms still printed in the Prayer Book and sung in Anglican churches is, in fact, COVERDALE's; it is of great beauty, and the Authorized Version never supplanted it. But COVERDALE himself was no innovator; indeed his scholarship was weak, and he had to rely largely on other men's works. By far the most important of these was William TYNDALE; and with him we reach the end of our pedigree, and discover the true ancestor of the Authorized Version. We find, indeed, another connection with Cologne; for TYNDALE came here about August 1525, and entrusted to a printer called Peter QUENTEL the manuscript of his New Testament. TYNDALE'S activities were reported to the city senate, and he had to leave for Worms before the work was finished, but not before the first pages of an English Bible had been printed. The precious sheets were long lost, but a single copy of the 64 pages was discovered in 1834 and placed in the British Museum.

The date of this translation is therefore very close to that of LUTHER's German version; and TYNDALE's Bible takes its place in the great movement of biblical scholarship and translation that stirred Europe in the early 16th century; a movement not restricted to the Protestant side, which includes the great editions of the original texts produced by such men as ERASMUS and Cardinal XIMENES.

Even TYNDALE's Bible is not the first in English. There is a still earlier one associated with the name of John WYCLIFF; and parts at least had been translated into the spoken tongue even before the Norman conquest. The life of the Venerable BEDE describes how, on his death-bed in 735, he finished a translation of St. John's Gospel into Anglo-Saxon. But no translation before TYNDALE's has much pretension to style; and it is the general view of scholars that he set the model that was to be followed by all succeeding versions up to that of 1611. Indeed a modern poct and critic, Robert GRAVES, has maintained that the greatness of the Authorized Version, "like that of the versions of ST.

JEROME and LUTHER, derives from the fact that it is substantially the work of a single man of genius – William TYNDALE." It is an exaggeration, but it contains an element of truth. GRAVES is something of a “wild man”, of individual and provocative views; but he is here in agreement with a very sober scholar, James BOSWORTH, who wrote in 1909 that TYNDALE's translation “is, in substance, our present Authorized Version”.

Archaic Idiom of the Authorized Version

We are now in a position to appreciate the words, with which the men of 1611 introduce their work: - "Truly (good Christian Reader) 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, not justly to be excepted against." They had, in fact, no particular desire to conform to contemporary idiom; and it is a truth not often realized that their version, even when it was published, had a distinctly archaic flavour. Such forms as the termination 'eth' in the 3rd person of the verb –'asketh', 'saith' – were as old-fashioned as the heavy gothic type in which the Bible of 1611 was printed. And I think the archaic forms of speech were willingly retained, like the type itself, to give a stateliness and majesty to the sacred text. It was the consistent desire of the Tudor and Stuart divines to clothe all religious texts in a dignified and eloquent form. I think I can illustrate this best by quoting from the Prayer Book itself, which dates from the middle of the 16th century. The collect for the Sunday before Christmas prays the Lord to come in power: “that whereas through our sins and wickedness we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us.” The prayer, like most of those in the book, is translated from the Latin; and it is remarkable how the spare, sinewy language of the original has been expanded to twice its length by devices that are essentially rhetorical. The doublings of words, 'let and hindered,” “sins and wickedness,” “help and deliver,' are constructed deliberately, on the model of the Ciceronian ' oro et obsecro,' for the purpose of elevating the tone, and perhaps also of compensating, in a sense, for the loss of the hieratic Latin.

An Age of Artificial Language

The whole trend of the age, indeed, was towards rhetoric; and its besetting sin was a tendency to indulge in forced, fantastic and artificial language. SHAKESPEARE is by no means free from this taint; and such a translation as CHAPMAN's Homer shows us the sort of embroidering and heightening that delighted the taste of the time. When Hector tells

Andromache that the time must come when sacred Troy shall fall, this becomes

When sacred Troy shall weep for her towers for tears of overthrow.

And this is quite a moderate example. From all such extravagances the Bible translators were preserved by the absolute obligation to follow the sacred text, if not word for word, at least with scrupulous fidelity. They did not feel the need to be slavishly literal. They rendered St. Paul's μὴ γένοιτο by "God forbid," when they could find no other equivalent of the Greek. But generally they conveyed the sense, as they understood it, as exactly as they could into sound and dignified English, often echoing the rhythm and vocabulary of the Vulgate Latin which they all knew so well.

It is not easy to enter into their feelings for the Bible as literature. We are accustomed to think of the Bible, or at least of great parts of it, as sublime, poetic, beautiful in the highest degree; but we may easily forget that this is a comparatively modern attitude. C. S. LEWIS, in an admirable essay on the subject, has pointed out that throughout most of Christian history the style of the Bible has been considered humble, low and bare; and commentators regularly contrasted the poverty of the literal sense with the spiritual treasures of allegory hidden within it. The transition from this view to the modern one, was just beginning in the early 17th century. The king's translators certainly seem to us to show in their work an awareness of the literary beauties of the Bible, and there is no doubt that the splendour of their version helped to reveal these beauties to others. It was not long before MILTON should affirm, in *Paradise Regained*, that the Hebrew psalms and songs were superior in beauty to any of the lyric poetry of Greece and Rome.

I think we can see now a little more clearly just what the Authorized Version was. It was not a new undertaking, and it was not a translation into the spoken idiom of the time. It was indeed the "one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against" that its editors claimed: the crowning achievement of a long process, which set the final seal of perfection on the patient work of many men. It is indeed fascinating to compare a given passage in the different versions from TYNDALE onwards. Often the new translation offers nothing in the wording that is new; the best has been taken from each, and the result has been welded into a unity that seems as we read it inevitable. One wonders that it had not been thought of before. So, when we look at the rough draft of a familiar poem, we may be quite amused at the author's ineptitude in writing some awkward variant of the perfect phrase that seems so obvious to us, now that we know it. The classical finality of great literature is deceptive, and hides the creative effort that went to its making.

The Mystery of a Masterpiece

The King James' version is a masterpiece of English literature. How and why it is so is a mystery. Nothing would appear, on the face of it, more improbable. To begin with, the original texts are not uniformly excellent as literature. Parts of the Old Testament are great literature; others are derivative or inferior in style. As for the New Testament it is written in a language that had long lost the splendid vitality of its golden age, a dull, flattened international language which had already suffered the fate which threatens English in the 20th century. It was used as a convenience by writers who thought in another idiom, and who in any case had no great concern for style. And this difficult, infinitely varied, text has been rendered into English not by a single man of genius, but by a committee of scholars none of whom were writers of any eminence. Moreover they worked, as it were, in chains, bound by their principles to the wording of the sacred original. Yet the fact remains: they were able to find a style adapted to heroic narrative, to impassioned and highly figurative poetry, to the artless simplicity, more moving than any art, of the Gospel narratives, and to the involved and highly personal style of St. Paul's epistles. They seem to have known by instinct just how much English can absorb of Semitic construction and imagery, and when a discreet paraphrase was necessary.

One can only say that a great style was in the air. The very solemnity of their task shielded them from the vices and follies of the age; they were animated by a spirit which was to find a parallel expression in the great divines of the I7th century, in the sermons and theological writings of such men as John DONNE, Lancelot ANDREWES and Jeremy TAYLOR, and in the poetry Of MILTON. Yet none of these, for all their genius, have surpassed, or equalled, the style achieved by the forgotten scholars who produced the Authorized Version.

Tampering by the "Revisers"

Nothing more clearly demonstrates the miraculous unity and balance of this style than the disastrous effect of any tampering with it. The revisers of 1881 were as confident that they could reproduce the same effect as their contemporaries who were busy rebuilding and "improving" great parts of our Gothic cathedrals; and in much the same way they produced a sad hotch-potch of genuine and sham.

In the superb translation of the Song of Songs the text of 1611 reads:

> "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners."

It is almost incredible that the Victorian revisers thought they could elevate this still further by changing the ending to "terrible as a bannered host." In the same book occurs the

phrase "also our bed is green;" the revisers felt it necessary to change 'bed' to 'couch.' It is often claimed today that the language of the Authorized Version is too lofty and poetic. It is interesting to see that parts of it were so recently thought to be too low and homely, exactly as SHAKESPEARE was condemned in the 18th century for using such low expressions as:

"nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark."

The Authorized Version became therefore the English Bible, the only Bible known to the great majority of Englishmen, and remained so without rival for 2 ½ centuries, a period stretching from the England Of SHAKESPEARE and BACON to that of Thomas HARDY and Henry JAMES. And during this long period the Bible was a familiar book to millions in all classes of society. Innumerable simple people who read little else regularly read the whole Bible, and I mean the whole Bible, once, twice or three times a year. What can one say of the effect of this on our language, our literature and on the English imagination itself?

Effect on Language Development

We must be careful not to say too much. It is sometimes suggested that the Bible, this Bible, has had a deep effect on the development of the language, or on the subsequent course of English letters. But the Authorized Version comes quite late in the linguistic development of the country, when there was no longer any question of establishing the pre-eminence of any particular regional form of the language. And a literature that had already produced “Hamlet” had passed beyond the stage at which general formative influences can have much effect. Let us imagine, say, that LUTHER had published his Bible when GOETHE was living in retirement at Weimar. I am inclined to think that the only important way in which the Authorized Version has influenced the spoken language is by giving it innumerable half-proverbial phrases; and these, so far as they are felt to be quotations, are really foreign bodies embedded in the colloquial speech. It is significant that very many of these are almost always used in a faintly jocular tone. I do not think there is any irreverence behind this; on the contrary, I am sure it comes from a sort of apology for bringing down anything so lofty to the I - el of everyday use. However, it is a fact that such phrases as "to spoil the Egyptians," "bread on the waters," "the fatted calf," "cloals of fire," "the fat of the land," have definite facetious overtones which would make serious writers avoid them; and the same is true of countless turns of speech that from their very familiarity have sunk to the level of clichés. I am thinking of phrases like: "to rise up as one man," "to escape with the skin of one's teeth," "to spy out the land." They have become the threadbare devices of the

inferior writer; and they are only one element of an immense store of similar wares, derived from *Hamlet,* from the Prayer Book, from *Alice in Wonderland,* and from a hundred other sources.

And as for the basic fabric and rhythm of our literary prose, it is derived from quite other sources, from the old flowing narrative of MALORY, and especially from the classically balanced prose developed in the 18th century by such masters as SWIFT and Samuel JOHNSON, a style which owes little, if anything, to the Bible. Even writers like RUSKIN who have acknowledged the formative influence of the Bible derive their style in all essentials from this central tradition.

And where such influence is clear, it is often harmful. A good example is KIPLING, whose style is certainly not improved by its intrusive Biblical echoes.

"Now Dinah was a subtle little beast of the field."

This sort of thing is too common in his stories. It refers of course to the serpent in Genesis, and it conveys a definite meaning; but it does so with an irritating air of knowingness, almost the stylistic equivalent of a wink.

Why a New Translation?

And so we come to modern times. I think what I have just said will suggest a reason, beyond that generally adduced, why a radically new translation was thought necessary. The old one is often said to be remote, archaic, strange and obscure to the modem man; but there is a sense in which the more familiar parts of it have become too familiar. Constant use of its language in rather debased contexts has given it a worn and pompous air that it does not really merit. One might think of the Parthenon as yet another of those boring classical temples. Anyhow, the need has been long and widely felt; and of course the great progress of textual criticism has given point to the demand for a new and more accurate version, based on the best text now available. This need was already felt nearly a century ago, and it has become more apparent with the course of time.

We are separated from the revision of 1881 by roughly the same span of time as separated the Authorized Version from Tyndale; and in each case the interval has been filled by a whole series of versions, complete or partial. The present translators therefore have before them a number of full-scale attempts to render the Bible into language of varying degrees of modernity. Some have gone very far in this direction, others have hung bacl,, preferring some sort of "timeless" English, hoping thereby to avoid the danger of following a transitory fashion of contemporary speech. For of course the contemporary cannot, in its nature, remain so; and nothing seems quite so out of date as the fashion of the generation before our own. It is a task of extreme delicacy to disentangle from the speech of our own day those elements which are subject to rapid change and those which are reasonably stable.

Yet this is precisely what the translators must do if their work is to have a validity extending beyond a few decades. No doubt the problem was carefully pondered when, in the years following the war, detailed plans were made for the production of the New English Bible.

We know indeed that the question of style was thought so important that it could not safely be left to the scholars themselves; and a special panel of literary advisors was appointed to go over, and improve where necessary, the text submitted by the experts. No doubt the decision was a wise one; but it is a little sad to reflect that this should be necessary – it was not so in 1611; and there is also something synthetic and selfconscious in the whole process. Style is not, except in a very superficial sense, something that can be added as a final ingredient to a piece of writing; it is, or should be, something inseparable from the creative process itself. Still, it would certainly have been rash to hope that the miracle of 1611 would be repeated; and no doubt some such arrangement was necessary.

In the introduction to the New Testament, the translators explain what they are trying to do. They have tried to render the Greek text, as they understood it, "into the English of the present day, that is, into the natural vocabulary, constructions and rhythms of contemporary speech." It is a bold undertaking and a difficult one; and critics have not been slow to point out one basic difficulty: that the Bible treats of many things which simply do not occur in contemporary speech, and what is more serious, treats them in ways that do not come naturally to modern man. As one critic wrote: "You can change 'box' or'cruse' to 'bottle;'but what can you do with angels and miracles and the wailing and gnashing of teeth?" Certain modern translators have tried, consciously or unconsciously, to adapt the language and even the ideas of the Bible to modern notions – a process whose dangers are obvious. Thus one very popular translator has softened the Pauline text on the subjection of women by turning it tactfully into: "Wives, adapt yourselves to your husbands" – an excellent sentiment, but not what St. Paul wrote. The same translator simply could not translate "Salute one another with a holy kiss," and so substituted "A hand-shake all round, please." Such things can be defended; but once begun, it is difficult to see where the process will end. And there is a danger, if I may use a homely expression, of throwing out the baby with the bath water; that is, of softening or smoothing over something not the less essential to Christianity for being harsh, strange and even shocking to 20th Century minds.

Style of the New English Bible

The New English Bible does not go to such extremes. Its translators say firmly that they intend to offer "a translation in the strict sense, not a paraphrase." Yet the strictness is qualified: "We have conceived our task to be that of understanding the original as precisely as we could, and then saying again in our own native idiom what we believed the author to be saying in his." And they go on to admit that this principle has often compelled them to

"take decisions where the older method of translation allowed a comfortable ambiguity." This is certainly true; and perhaps the greatest interest of the new translation, at least for the general reader, lies in its constant effort to wring a clear meaning out of even the most difficult or mysterious passage, and to express it in the simplest language. An example will show the principle in action, and also illustrate certain features of the style of the new version.

The first Beatitude reads in the traditional version:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

It is a literal translation, except that the Greek word is somewhat stronger than the English-practically 'beggars.' For this the New English Bible gives:

"How blest are those who know that they are poor."

This is, at first hearing, startling. Yet it means something; and it is both interesting and useful to have such a clear meaning thrust upon one. None the less, there is an element of interpretation here that seems, to me at least, to go a little beyond strict translation.

And how is it for style? I think, a little unsteady, and at the same time a little dull or wooden; and this defect is found rather often in the work. Let us read on:

"How blest are the sorrowful; they shall find consolation."

So one version; the other has:

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

This is an interesting comparison. One might well wonder, if one did not know, which is the old and which the new. In fact the second version is the ancient one, and it differs from the modern chiefly in two ways. First, the syntax is stronger; it depends on its verbs, whereas the new substitutes for the two verbs an adjective and a noun, supported by a colourless, servile, auxiliary verb. Secondly, the old is simpler and quieter in tone. "They shall be comforted" says exactly what it means; "They shall find consolation" colours the meaning with rhetorical unction. There is, and most surprisingly, a slight but unmistakable "writing up," which reminds us of the Victorian alteration of "army" to "host." And one must indeed, in reading such a passage, sympathize with the translators in their formidable task. Christ's original hearers exclaimed: "Never man spake as this man." What accent can we find in our everyday speech that will hit the proper tone?

And indeed, in the words of Christ, and in the narratives of the Passion, the translators often hesitate, as well they might, to follow their avowed principles. Such phrases as "Hail, king," "Behold the man," which they keep, are not contemporary in idiom. We do not use such language; and "behold" could have been modernised without much difficulty. Equally archaic is the utterance from the cross "I thirst." And this contrasts with the genuinely modern "They do not know what they are doing." This quotation brings out very well one clear distinction of style between the two versions. The spare directness and power of "They know not what they do" is not possible in modern English. Our verbs grow feeble; they need

props to hold them up. And the process continues. "Have you" still struggles on in England, but even there it is giving way to the soft international "Do you have."

So then, there is archaism in the new Bible, and a surprising amount.

"My hour is not yet come."

"Let your magnanimity be manifest to all."

"Speaking in tongues of ecstasy."

This is not the idiom of contemporary English. Even our old friend the "fatted calf" turns up again; and this I can only explain as the new version quoting the old.

Stately Idiom and Contemporary Slang

Yet besides such stately idiom, we find words not merely contemporary but verging on slang. St. Paul defends himself from an imputation of "sponging" on his hosts, and exhorts Christians to beware of "snobbery." The explanation of this extreme variation of tone is no doubt to be found in an effort to follow the style of the original. Thus the modern second person singular is normally used, as one would expect; but the archaic "thou" and "thee" are used, for instance, in the Lord's Prayer, and in the great prayer of Jesus in the 17th Chapter of St. John. Indeed, it would be true to say that this whole chapter is not really modernised at all.

I have chosen examples for comparison, usually to the disadvantage of the new version, mainly from short and simple sentences that, apart from vocabulary, are not really obscure in the Authorized Version. Such a sentence as:

"The veil of the temple was rent in twain" carries an unmistakable meaning in spite of its archaic words, and one may feel a reaction of impatience to read "The curtain of the temple was torn in half." But it is not fair to judge the new version by such comparisons, or indeed by any brief quotations. It is at its best, not in the vivid phrases and great familiar quotations, but in the ordinary stuff of Gospel narrative, in the steady development of the Acts of the Apostles, and especially in the involved, changing and vehement style of the Pauline epistles. It is true, when all reservations have been made, that the sacred book speaks to us in our own language, and that this is a rewarding and enlightening experience. The style is, in spite of the good advice of its literary panel, seldom very distinguished. In my opinion it will not compare for beauty with the superb version of the four gospels published in the Penguin Books by E. V. RIEU. It certainly lacks the coherence of the single-handed achievements of MOFFATT and KNOX. But it has a sort of dogged integrity that is worthy of much respect, and at its best it becomes, as its makers probably wished it to be, almost translucent. Then we forget it altogether, and attend only to what the original writers had to say. If anyone wishes to judge it fairly, I would recommend him to read one of the less familiar letters of St. Paul in the new text, occasionally glancing at that of the

Authorized Version. I shall be surprised if he does not turn back, to the new one with a certain relief; it is so much clearer, so much easier to follow. It must be admitted that it is not merely the English rendering that has been modernised; much of the complexity of the original has been quietly disentangled; and many long sentences have been cut into several short ones. But however it is done, the result is to draw the reader on, to capture his interest and to make him feel that he understands what he is reading. Much remains to be done, and we must certainly wait for the publication of the Old Testament, and allow time for reflection, before passing judgment on the new Bible. It is already evident, from the many quotations in the New Testament, that the poetic books of the old will be rendered into a somewhat heightened style, a stage removed from the common speech; and this will be in many ways a severer test than anything in the New Testament.

Further Revisions Necessary

And I think myself that we must also look forward to a further revision, or revisions, of the published text. Sudi revision after a number of years is in fact foreseen by the editors. I feel that it could be greatly improved; and no doubt it will be. Yet it is certainly an impressive achievement, and the very width of its diffusion has justified the effort expended on it.

And now what will happen to the old? It has already lost much of its former hold on the English imagination, for the habit of Biblereading has all but died out. And I do not regard it as having a great future as a purely literary classic. As Professor LEWIS has well pointed out, the idea of the "Bible as Literature" is something of an illusion. Literary excellence is always a by-product of the immense spiritual drive that animates the whole collection. I think that few except Christians are ever likely to read it; and they will always read it primarily for non-literary values.

It is dangerous to prophesy; but I feel that some will always agree with the poet who said, "The old was holier." It will always be used liturgically, at least on solemn occasions. It might even be very effective to use it in association with the new version, the one for the Hebrew, the other for the Greek scriptures. This would bring out very tellingly the important truth that the Old Testament is as it were, scripture twice over, since it was accepted as venerable and authoritative by the New Testament writers, and indeed by Christ himself.

I hope at least that something of the sort will happen.

One may wonder: is this translation the "principal good one" that will sum up the best in its predecessors, and satisfy the needs of generations, or centuries, to come? It is not likely, at least in the sense that the new version will supersede all its forerunners. The 16th century Bibles had all roughly the same purpose, and this purpose was fulfilled in the Authorized Version; but this is not quite true of the 20th century. We are not so united in culture, or so unanimous in our needs, as the men of those days; and the different translators

have had slightly different aims. There may be a place, in fact, for several versions.

Even our congenital vice of snobbery rears its ugly head in the discussion: someone has suggested that the Authorized Version will be the Bible of Oxford and Winchester, the New English Bible that of Redbrick, and the comprehensive school. It is a horrid notion.

What one can say with confidence is that the Authorized Version is a permanent possession of the English-speaking world. The New English Bible is a fine attempt, not wholly unsuccessful, to turn the Bible into clear, smooth, unpretentious modern English.

Source : *Babel*, vol. IX, n^{0} 1-2, 1963, p. 70-79