

For the Christian Messenger.

THE REVISION OF THE ENGLISH SCRIPTURES.

BY REV. CHARLES TUPPER, D. D.

AN ESSAY READ AT THE BAPTIST MINISTERIAL INSTITUTE AT YARMOUTH, 1871.

(Conclusion.)

It will be naturally enquired, what improvements may be anticipated from a Revision of the common English Version of the Bible conducted in the manner now proposed? A few may be suggested:

1. Grammatical inaccuracies would be corrected. The existence of these is undeniable; (see Matth. vi. 19. Luke xii. 24. Acts xxvi. 5) as is also the desirableness of the correction of them. Though the number of the violations of the rules of English Grammar, as it was taught in 1611, is comparatively small, yet such as do occur, together with expressions now considered ungrammatical, tend to bring both the Version and those who made it into disrepute. Indeed, it is very difficult to suggest to a child, or to an uninformed person—as must now be done in some cases—that there is anything wrong, even in the grammatical construction, without seeming to speak disrespectfully of the Book itself, and consequently exciting prejudice against it. The corrections which such a Board as that proposed would make without a dissenting voice, would at once remove this inconvenience; and great benefit would unquestionably result from its removal.

2. The improvements which have been made in English Grammar would be introduced. Many persons imagine—as intimated above—that the Translators frequently violated the rules of grammatical accuracy in cases in which no such rules were known in their time. For instance, it is now improper to say, "Our Father which art in heaven"; but it was not so two hundred and forty—now 200—years ago, before the introduction of the useful distinction between the pronouns who, referring to personality, and which, now applied, as a relative, to irrational beings and inanimate things only. Substantially the same remark may be made with regard to the difference in the import of the words shall and will. In the present state of the English language, the statement, "The wicked shall do wickedly," (Danl. xii. 10) conveys the idea that they will be compelled to do so, but the Translators doubtless intended to express the prediction by the use of the future tense, now properly indicated in such case by the word will—"The wicked will do wickedly." (Compare 1 Saml. xxiv. 13. James i. 13, 14.) The introduction of these and similar improvements would not only render the style of the English Bible a more suitable model for imitation, and consequently make the Book more attractive to many readers, but it would also remove obscurity from many passages of holy writ, and present their import in its true light.

3. For obsolete words, and those of which the meaning is changed, appropriate words would be substituted. The substitution of the word know for "wist" and "wot," frighten for "fray," plowing for "earring," falsehood for "lesning," etc., would both improve the style and also render the sense much plainer to ordinary readers. There are likewise many words which are now in common use, of which the meaning has undergone such a change that they express ideas entirely different from those intended by the Translators. For instance, the word prevent was formerly used, according to its etymology, to denote preceding; but it now means to hinder. To persons acquainted with the modern sense of this word only, the following statement must appear very strange, "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried—Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word."—"We which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep." (Ps. cxix. 147, 148. 1 Thess. iv. 15.) The difficulty would be at once removed by the substitution of the appropriate term—"I preceded the dawning of morning and cried—Mine eyes preceded the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word."—"We who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who are asleep." A reader of ordinary intelligence would immediately perceive, that the Psalmists meaning is, "I arose for prayer and meditation before the break of day," and of the Apostle, "The bodies of the saints who are living at Christ's second advent, will not enter heaven any sooner than those of the pious dead."

In like manner the word conversation, which is now—except in a law phrase—

limited to discourse, was formerly employed to signify deportment, general conduct, or behaviour, including both words and actions. Thus it is said, "Who is a wise man, and endured with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation"—by a good deportment—"his works with meekness of wisdom." (James iii. 13. See also Ps. xxxvii. 14; i. 23. 1 Tim. iv. 12.) In Phil. iii. 20, the word (politeuma) rendered "conversation," means citizenship; and the import of the clause rendered, "Our conversation is in heaven," is, "We are citizens of heaven."

So likewise such antiquated phrases as "Take no thought," "We do you to wit," "God forbid," "the Holy Ghost," etc., would be superseded by the appropriate modern phrases, "Be not anxious," "we inform you," "far be it," or "by no means," as the connexion may require, "the Holy Spirit," etc. The numerous changes of this kind in which learned men, how diversified soever their views on some points of doctrine or of duty might be, could not fail to be agreed, would greatly improve our authorized Version of the Bible. No man who is at all acquainted with the subject will call this in question.

4. Indicate words and phrases would be exchanged for such as are not so. As numerous words and combinations of words have become changed in their import, so there are others that were once suitable to be read in families and congregations, which are now unsuitable. The ideas designed to be conveyed by the original, may in many instances be expressed in terms which cannot offend the most delicate ear, where a literal translation of the periphrasis employed, must necessarily be revolting to all sense of decency. Instead of some such exceptional expressions the meaning may be indicated thus:—"This was born first." (Gen. xxxvii. 28.) "Such as are born first even the first-born of all the children of Israel." (Numb. viii. 16.)—"If I leave of all that pertain to him, by the morning light, any man. (1 Saml. xxv. 22, 24.) "Because it prevented not my birth, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes. Why did I not die at the time of my birth? Why did I not expire as soon as I was born?" (Job iii. 10, 11. Compare John ix. 19.) "Then are ye illegitimate, and not sons."—"But fornicators and adulterers, God will judge." (Heb. xii. 8; xiii. 4.)

In many similar instances the true import of the original may be clearly expressed in terms which gentlemen and ladies may, without a blush, utter distinctly in the presence of men, women and children. This would undeniably be a very great improvement.

5. The principal erroneous translations would be corrected. Considering the extent of the Book, and the obscurity in which some portions of it are, from various causes, involved, the number of material errors in translating appears to me to be comparatively small. Every competent judge, however, knows that there are some. A few instances may be noticed.

In Exod. xi. 2, the word (shaal) rendered "borrow," properly signifies to ask, without intimating any intention of returning. (See Jud. v. 25. Ps. ii. 8. Zech. x. 1.) In ten of the versions in my possession it is correctly so rendered in this text; but in the common Version it is unhappily translated in such a manner as to represent Israelites as being divinely instructed to "borrow" without intending to pay, and consequently to act fraudulently. There could be no impropriety in their asking for "jewels of silver," etc., and we are informed that "the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians," and (as the Geneva Translation has it, xii. 36) "they granted their request," being "urgent" to "send them out of the land in haste." Exod. xi. 2, 3, xii. 33, 35, 36. Ps. iv. 38.

In Matt. xix. 4, the fact adduced by our Lord, according to the common Version, that God in making mankind "at the beginning, made them male and female," does not furnish any argument against arbitrary divorce and polygamy, against which it was obviously alleged as an argument. When, however, the words are accurately translated—"Made them (arsen kai thelu) a male and a female"—only one woman for one man—slight as the change seems, the force of the argument becomes apparent.

In Acts xiv. 4, the word "Easter," (which probably inserted through inadvertence, but which is adapted to mislead,) would doubtless be expunged, and all obscurity and misapprehension would be removed by the introduction of the proper term passover, by which the word pascha is translated in all other places.

In Rev. iv. 6, &c., it was in all probability in the same way that the word "beasts" happened to be used. This word, which is obviously inappropriate here, would unquestionably be at once superseded by the proper Version of the Greek (zoa) living creatures, by which the corresponding Hebrew term is correctly rendered in Ezekiel i. 5, &c.

From the brief view now exhibited three things are apparent:—

1. That the need of a revision arises principally from the lapse of time, and the changes that have taken place in the English language since the common Version was made. Hence the making of such a revision would not imply any censure on the justly venerated Translators. Those who make it may well say of them as they said in their Preface, of preceding Translators whose versions they revised, "We acknowledge them to have been raised up of God for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance;" and may add, with them, "If we, building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labors, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good—they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us."

2. A revision judiciously made would be highly serviceable. Many imperfections, which will unavoidably prove detrimental so long as they continue would be removed; and the Bible would be read more extensively and more understandingly. Numerous passages which are either misunderstood, or not understood at all, would be rendered plain to ordinary readers.

3. Such a revision, so far as general utility is concerned, may be effected by such a combination as that now proposed. Those who expect to see a version, or a revision, that will settle all controversies—or any of them—among different denominations, are anticipating what will not be realized in the present state of things. As I have already shewn, and as every reflecting man must be aware, a version made by any one denomination, determining more definitely than does the common Version any point either of faith or of practice, would have no influence upon persons of other denominations, save that of fixing their minds in more resolute opposition against that sentiment. Whatever changes might be made, though few in number, in texts that have either a doctrinal or a practical bearing, by the unanimous voice of a Board composed of all the principal denominations, would be much more likely to be cordially received by all, and consequently to draw different bodies nearer to each other, and nearer to the truth.

Some may regard this proposal as chimerical; and alleged that nothing of the kind will ever be accomplished. It will, however, be quite inconsistent for any to attempt to raise objections against it, unless they can propose one more unexceptionable, and better adapted to effect the revival of our authorized Version of the Bible, in such a manner as will more certainly ensure improvement without deterioration, and will more effectually commend the English Scriptures to the confidence of all concerned. [That this Proposal, made 20 years ago, is now, in effect, being adopted, appears from the following extract.

Rev. G. Vance Smith, one of the Revisors, whom it was once proposed by some to expel from the Board, is reported to have made the following statements relative to the Revision now in progress, at a recent meeting in Birmingham, England.

"With respect to the revision of the Bible, in which he had the honor and pleasure of being engaged, he could not enter into details; but he thought the public might have every confidence that a thoroughly honest and truthful spirit was at work in the deliberations of the revisors. He did not say that the work would be perfect, for the revisors were human, and probably under the bias of theological opinions; but it was the desire of every member of the New Testament Company, to which he belonged, that the work should be done according to the evidence, and that candour and truth should prevail. He had no doubt this was the animating motive of every member of the company, as much as it was his own, and he certainly had no other motive than truth, and fairness, and faithfulness. The public might rely on it they would receive at the hands of the revisors a greatly improved version of the Scriptures. It would take a long time—it was thought it would take five or six years—to revise the New Testament, and even longer to revise the Old; but when it was remembered how great a multitude of peo-

ple were interested in the work, and that the work might live one or two hundred years, the length of time must not be grudged. On account of the slow progress of the work it was proposed to divide the company into two or three sections, but the feelings of impatience had gradually subsided, and it was thought better that the whole company should deliberate together, and decided very doubtful question by vote. So far as they had gone the new version satisfied him extremely, and in this respect that it read like the old one. There were changes in almost every verse—in some verses several—some more important than others, but all tending to more exact representation of the original; but, notwithstanding these numerous changes, it was the wish of the company to adhere as closely as possible to the old style, with which the people had been familiar from their childhood. The consequence was, the new version read extremely well, measuring it by the standard of the old one; and any one hearing it read would hardly know it was a new version.

Though it is not to be imagined that I will live to see this work accomplished, yet the statement that the Revisors are proceeding in it prudently and amicably affords me sincere pleasure. I trust it will be honorable to Deity, and highly beneficial to multitudes of the human family. So far as a judgement can at present be formed, it seems to me very desirable that all denominations of Christians should cordially unite in countenancing and receiving the Revision of the Sacred Scriptures in English now in progress, cautiously prepared, as it is being, by leading men among them, held in high estimation in their respective bodies, as possessing undivided piety, and profound erudition; and consequently well qualified for this important and necessary work.

Correspondence.

"KEEP IT NINE YEARS."

Mr. Editor, Will you please give the following extract a place in the Messenger And oblige,

I. C. M.

Edward Paxton Hood, in a lecture to the students of Spurgeon's College says with reference to new interpretations, new ideas, &c. Should there not be caution. Keep it nine years. You have all heard that famous maxim of Horace, "Let it be suppressed for nine years." And we may act on the spirit of this cautious advice, so far that all new ideas, and strange ideas, all heretical ideas, thoughts and things, which jeopardize our usefulness, which assault the opinion of ages, which seem to contravene the best experience of holy souls and sainted men—they may be possibly true, it may be your duty to publish them, but probably they may not, therefore "Put it by for nine years." A valuable caution surely for students, a caution it would be wise to heed through all the years of one's ministry. Who has not been captivated almost infatuated of a new view of some portion of God's word? Who in these times of demand for the pulpit for something new, entertaining, racy, has not felt a strong temptation to set out on a voyage of discovery, that he may meet the demand, hold and increase his audience, to say nothing of the temptation to do this for the sake of popularity and an enlarged reputation? And who has not after a few months or years, abandoned the result of his original thinking and profound research, and come back to the old idea, the old and generally received interpretation to rest in that—caution before the old is surrendered, and the new embraced, is wise. It is easier to stop and think, than to retrace our steps. Without this caution there must be often a retracing of steps, if truth is candidly sought, and one would walk in the light. Many a man, it will not be denied, has too late realized the consequences of haste—of not "keeping it nine years," in injury to himself, his church, his denomination, the cause.

For the Christian Messenger.

ELUCIDATION OF SCRIPTURE.

Mr. Editor,—

An inquiry proposed respecting an expression used in Matth. xix. 28, in C. M., Dec. 20, 1839, has casually attracted my notice. The solution then proposed, though substantially correct, does not appear to me to place the subject in so clear a light as is desirable. The inquirers principal difficulty seems to have arisen from his apprehension, that the text represented Christ as passing through a regeneration in which

the apostles followed Him. Correctly regarding the terms regeneration and renovation as of nearly the same import, he could "not understand in what respect the Saviour required regeneration."

His misapprehension and perplexity probably arose from reading the passage in a copy wherein it is incorrectly pointed thus—"Ye which have followed me in the regeneration," &c. But in the more correct editions there is a comma after the word "me"—"Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration" [the renovated state] "when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones," &c. The word (polignesis) rendered "regeneration," does not here refer to the change effected in persons by the new birth, but to the blissful state of the saved. In the Syriac Version it is (Bolmo chadtho.) in the new-world. The text was a gracious promise to the apostles who followed Christ, of future glory when He would make all things new." Rev. xxi. 1, 5. 2 Peter iii. 13.

Another passage may be noticed in which the diversity of pointing in different editions of the Common Version makes a material difference in the sense. I refer to Heb. x. 12th, where some copies read, "But this man, [Christ] after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." In others it is pointed thus, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Learned men are divided in their views as to which of these is correct. The latter appears to me to present the idea intended by the Apostle. The sitting of Christ for ever at the right hand of the Father, does not seem to be connected with Paul's train of thought, or his course of reasoning. He was showing to the Jews the insufficiency and inefficacy of the sacrifices offered under the law. In proof of this he referred to the frequent and continuous repetitions of these sacrifices; which could not have been requisite, had any of them been actually and permanently efficacious (Heb. x. 1-4.) After remarking, (ver. 11th.) "Every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;" he proceeds, in the 12th verse, to notice the perfect and endless efficacy of the one sacrifice offered by Christ, prior to His sitting down at the right hand of God, that this "one sacrifice for sins" was "for ever;" and could therefore never need repetition. This view is confirmed by verse 14th, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

Yours as ever,

C. TUPPER.

Aylesford, Mar. 5, 1873.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE Church Chronicle AND ITS "CLERGYMAN."

The Church Chronicle editorial in its issue of Feb. 20th., in reference to a series of articles from the pen of "a clergyman" appearing in that journal, and styled "Observations on Dr. Cramp's Baptist History," seems to demand some notice. Such a flagrant, unwarrantable and vicious attack as the Chronicle makes upon our denomination, is certainly in keeping with the character of the "Observations," from which it evidently derives its inspiration. The attack is extremely abrupt, spirited and brief, but brevity, for once at least, has lost its character of being "the soul of wit," for a more witless production, considering the presumed intellectual standing of its author, could with difficulty be imagined. To attempt an examination, in detail, of its animadversions, would be a waste of time and material. It contains one positive statement, however, so startling and novel in its character, as to awaken grave suspicion, that the ecstasy of emotions evidently caused in the mind of the author by reading the productions of the aforesaid "clergyman," has been too severe a strain upon his nervous system. The statement in question is that "The distinctive doctrine of the denomination (Baptist) never disturbed the faith of Christendom until first preached by Peterall Bria, a Frenchman, in the twelfth century." Here is a violent perversion of the truth, as well as a studied and deliberate insult to the christian standing of our denomination. Inventions and discoveries are the order of the day, and the former sometimes takes the place of the latter, as in the present instance. If the Chronicle persists in startling the religious world with revelations like the above, it will be necessary to prescribe for it a special course of remedial in order to correct its irregu-