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The Bible and its Translations.

NOTES OF A DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN THE BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE, BEDEQUE, P. E. I., ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, AUG. 12, 1866.

BY J. M. CRAMP, D. D.

HEBREWS vi. 5.—"The good word of God."

Joshua's bible consisted of the four books of Moses, and perhaps the book of Job; that was to him "the good word of God." Hezekiah's bible was a larger book; it comprised in addition to those just mentioned several of the historical portions of the Old Testament, the greater number of the Psalms, the Proverbs and other writings ascribed to Solomon, and the book of Jonah. In the Bible used by our Saviour, the prophetic and other writings were added, by which the value of the volume was greatly increased. Joshua's Bible was "the good word of God;" so was Hezekiah's; much more, the Bible of the gospel era. Then came the revelations of the new covenant. Twenty-seven new compositions were added to the list, disclosing the final purposes of God, and containing his last messages; and here we have "the good word of God" in its complete form.

And that it is "the good word of God," who can doubt? It contains the most ancient and authentic history—a history not obscured like profane histories, by myths and fables, and dark mystical mythologies, but furnishing the only clear and intelligible account we have of the origin of all things, and tracing the nations of antiquity to their sources.—Biographies of surpassing interest adorn its pages—commonly too brief, sometimes graphically minute, and always distinguished by skillful selection of incidents.—The Poetry of the Bible is of the very highest order. There is the ode of triumph—the elegy—fine specimens of the lyric—and "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," breathing exalted devotion.—Wonderful prophecies are there—vastly unlike heathen oracles, which were so ambiguous that they might be twisted to any purpose—clear predictions of events uttered many centuries before the events took place, and marvellously accomplished. We read the past histories of empires in prophecies fulfilled; we see the future state of the world in prophecy unfulfilled; for though we "know not the times or the seasons," we are assured of the result, and we know that the time will come when the victorious church shall exclaim, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."—That the Bible contains clear and comprehensive theology—the science that teaches of God, his perfections, laws, and modes of government; and that it inculcates the purest morality, the out-flowing of love to God and man, enforced by the most powerful motives, does not require to be proved.

Such a book is fitly styled "the good word of God." It admonishes and alarms the sinner; guides the inquirer to truth; and is the saint's daily manual, directing him in his perplexities, strengthening him in his weakness, comforting him in his griefs; his portion in life, his solace in the dying hour. And it is this to all men, of every land, in every condition, the bond and the free, the poor and the rich, the king in his palace, the peasant in his cottage. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Now, it will be admitted that it is highly desirable and important to possess the divine volume in a complete and uncorrupted state, and in a correct form. Before the invention of printing, when all books were transcribed by copyists, there was much greater danger of mistakes than there is now. God might have preserved his holy word from such danger, but he never interposes needlessly by miracle, and so the Bible shared the fate of all other books. In the numerous manuscripts which are still to be found in public libraries, some of them very ancient, there

are many errors of transcription. Sometimes, words have been omitted; sometimes, the order of the words has been changed; sometimes, additions have been made. It is the office of the critic to examine the claims of the "various readings," and in the exercise of an impartial judgement to restore the sacred text, as nearly as possible, to the state in which it was left by prophets and apostles. Two or three examples will make this plain.

In Isaiah ix. 3, we read thus; "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy, they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." Here is a manifest contradiction:—"thou hast not increased the joy—they joy before thee." But an explanation is found without much difficulty. There are two small Hebrew words which sound alike, but are written differently. If a person were writing from another's dictation he might easily make a mistake. If he supposed one of those words to be meant, he would write as it is translated in our authorized version;—if he thought the other word was the right word, Dr. Alexander's translation would convey the meaning—"Thou hast increased the nation, thou hast increased its joy." We may safely take that to be the correct reading. The substitution of it for the present text is in fact a restoration.

Again: the prayer, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer," closes with these words, in the authorized version of Matthew—"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever Amen." That doxology is wanting in Luke's Gospel. It is wanting in all the best manuscripts and versions, and it is now left out in the critical editions of the New Testament. By omitting it the prayer is restored to its original form.

In the celebrated passage in 1 John v. 7, there are certain words which are not found in any Greek Manuscript of antiquity, and are now generally acknowledged to be spurious. Omitting them, we obtain the following reading:—"For there are three that bear record, the spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one." That, it is now agreed, is the text as the Apostle John wrote it. It is thus restored.

Once more. We read in Rev. xxii. 14, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life." According to the most weighty authorities we ought to read, "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have a right." &c. By adopting that reading we effect another restoration. We do not alter the Bible; we remove a former alteration, and recover the author's own words.

So much for the text. We proceed to consider the translations. The Bible having been written in Hebrew and Greek would be a sealed book to those who did not understand those languages. Hence the desirability of translations, the need of which was early felt, and measures were taken to supply it. Greek having become the common language of a large part of the Roman Empire, the Old Testament was translated into that language in the third century before the Christian era. When the gospel began to be published among the nations they all desired to have the word of God in their own tongues, and the introduction of Christianity into a country was speedily followed by a translation of the scriptures into its language. Wycliffe's version, published in the year 1380, was the first complete version in English, and was a great blessing to the country for many years. But our language was then in a transition state, and in the course of 150 years so great changes had taken place that a new version was absolutely necessary.—William Tyndale was raised up by God for that work. His translation of the New Testament, first published in 1525, was admirably executed, and was the foundation of all subsequent efforts. The need of that translation, and the great improvement it effected, will be seen by placing before you our text, as it appears in the two versions. Let it be Mat. xii. 28—30. *John De Wycliffe*.—"Alle ye that ben travelen and ben charged come to me: and I schal fulfillle you. Take ye my yok on you and lerne ye of me, for I am mylde and meke in herte; and ye schulen finde rest to youre soules. For my yok is soft and my charge lyt." *William Tyndale*.—"Come unto me all ye that labour and are

laden, and I will ease you. Take my yoke on you and lerne of me, for I am meke and lowly in herte; and ye shall fynd rest unto youre soules. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The effects of the revival of learning before and during the Protestant Reformation were felt in every department of knowledge. Literature advanced with giant strides. In theology the influence of the new movement was remarkable, producing works of unusual excellence in style and character. Other translators followed Tyndale. Coverdale issued the Old Testament and the whole Bible, in conjunction with him, in 1535. Cranmer's Bible was published in 1539; the Geneva, in 1560. Every enterprise of this kind was an advantage gained. Critical skill was acquired, the range of biblical inquiry was enlarged, and materials for fresh investigations were accumulated in abundance. It was judged proper, at the beginning of the 17th century, to attempt an improvement on all preceding endeavours. King James I. commissioned a large body of divines, forty-seven in number, to prepare another translation. The work was completed in 1611, when the present authorised version appeared. As all that had gone before were revisions of preceding versions, so this was stated to be "with the former translations diligently compared and revised." It was the revised version of the seventeenth century.

By common consent the palm of excellence has been adjudged to it. The translators have wonderfully caught the spirit of the original. It is not so free as to be loose, nor so literal as to be stiff and constrained. The work was far better done than could have been expected, in the then existing state of critical knowledge.

Two hundred and fifty-five years have passed away since its publication. During all that time, and especially within the last hundred years, biblical learning has made immense advances. Great numbers of manuscripts and many versions have been examined and compared, with a view to the correction and final settlement of the text. The ancient languages have been more profoundly studied, and their grammatical peculiarities more fully ascertained. The learned of this century are much better qualified for the revision of translations than their predecessors were. As a natural consequence, a large amount of labour of this kind has been performed. Scarcely a year passes without the addition of some version or commentary to the list. We have long been familiar with the names of Lowth, Blayney, Newcome, Doddridge, Macknight, and Dr. George Campbell. More modern times have given us, Boothroyd, Horsley, Henderson, Fairbairn, Alexander, Alford, Elliott, Conybeare and Howson, Ohlschlaeger, De Wette, Eadie, Stanley, and a host of others, of all countries and denominations. They are all revisionists.

Nothing is more common than for commentators to point out the changes which our language has undergone since King James's version was published, and the necessity of adapting the version to those changes. Thus, Dr. Adam Clarke observes, commenting on 2 Cor. viii. 12, "We do you to wit of the grace of God;"—"In all our dignified version very few ill-constructed sentences can be found; however, here is one, and the worst in the book. 'We do you to wit,' is, in the original, 'We make known to you.' This is plain and intelligible; the other is not so; and the former is now obsolete." How many words there are in our English Bible which are not understood, or are misunderstood by perhaps the majority of ordinary readers! There are but few persons, perhaps, who know the meaning of such words as "earing"—"leasing"—which then stood for "ploughing"—"falschood." There are but few who can tell us what things were intended by "taches," "ouches," "mufflers," "wimples," "knops" or who have learned that by the word "carriages" (Acts xxi. 15.)—"baggage" was meant—that the "nephews" of our version were "grandchildren"—that "instant" was used for "urgent," and "instantly" for "earnestly"—that to "let" was to "hinder," and to "prevent" was to "anticipate" or "go before"—or that the "hats" (Dan. iii. 21.) were "turbans." Surely every one will admit that such words

(and there are hundreds of them, which have either changed meaning or lost meaning) should be altered, and that a revision would be useful if it only effected that object, thus enabling plain English people to understand those passages of the Bible which have been hitherto dark to them.

But this is not all. We ought to have in our own tongue, as it is now spoken, the nearest possible representation of the thoughts which were expressed by the sacred writers in their Hebrew or Greek. If the existing translation is in any respects faulty or defective, the best scholarship should be employed to correct it. That it does require correction in very many places is too obvious to be denied, or is it to be at all wondered at when we take into consideration the inferior position occupied by Greek scholars two hundred and fifty years ago, and the comparatively imperfect state of biblical criticism at that time.

This subject was thoroughly discussed by Dean Trench (now Archbishop of Dublin) in his volume "On the authorized version of the New Testament, in connexion with some recent proposals for its revision," published in 1859.

He gives numerous specimens of improved rendering. For instance:—

Mark xi. 17. For, "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer"—read, "My house shall be called the house of prayer unto all nations."

1 Thess. v. 22. For, "all appearance of evil"—read, "all kind of evil."

1 Tim. vi. 5. For, "gain is godliness"—read, "godliness is lucre" (Coverdale.)

Mat. v. 21. For, "said by them"—read, "said to them."

Mark vi. 20. For, "observed him"—read, "kept, or defended him."

John xiv. 18. For, "comfortless"—read, "orphans."

John xvi. 8. For, "reprove"—read, "convince."

Luke xiv. 7. For, "chose out"—read, "were choosing out."

Luke v. 6. For, "their net brake"—read, "their net was at the point to break."

Luke ii. 49. For, "about my Father's business"—read, "in my Father's house."

Col. iii. 8. For, "spoil you"—read, "make a spoil of you."

Mat. xiv. 8. For, "being before instructed"—read, "being urged on."

Mat. xxiii. 24. For, "strain at"—read, "strain out."

Acts xvii. 22. For, "too superstitious"—read, "very religious."

Phil. iv. 8. For, "those"—read, "these" (referring to the females already mentioned.)

Col. i. 15. For, "first-born of every creature"—read, "born before every creature, or, 'before the whole creation.'"

In these cases, as well as in a vast number of others, the needful corrections have been made in the New Testament published by the American Bible Union, and this leads me to say a word or two respecting the circumstances under which a separate Bible movement originated nearly thirty years ago.

The British and Foreign Bible Society had for some time granted the sum of £500 sterling for every version of the New Testament executed by Protestant missionaries. The Baptist missionaries at Serampore had received several such grants. At length certain Presbyterian missionaries at Calcutta, informed the Committee of the Bible Society that in the Serampore versions the words relating to baptism were translated by words signifying immersion. Upon this the Committee interferred, and required a change of practice. No further help the missionaries were told, would be afforded them, unless "the Greek terms relating to baptism were rendered, either according to the principle adopted by the translators of the authorised English version, by a word derived from the original, or by such terms as may be considered unobjectionable by other denominations of Christians composing the Bible Society." That is, instead of translating faithfully they were either to leave certain words untranslated, or to translate them in such a manner as to satisfy other denominations. Neither course was consistent with honesty.