

ANGLO-AMERICAN

BIBLE REVISION.

BY

MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN REVISION COMMITTEE.

✓ American committee of revision  
of the Authorized English  
version of the Bible.

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THESE essays on the various aspects of the Anglo-American Bible revision now going on, are issued by the American Revision Committee as an explanatory statement to the friends and patrons of the cause, with the distinct understanding that suggestions and statements in regard to any particular changes to be made, express only the individual opinions of the writer, but not the final conclusions of the two Committees, who have not yet finished their work.

PHILIP SCHAFF,

NEW YORK, *March, 1879.*

*In behalf of the Committee.*

## THE ENGLISH BIBLE AS A CLASSIC.

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KING JAMES'S BIBLE.—The merits of the Authorized Version, in point of fidelity to the original, are universally acknowledged. No other version, ancient or modern, surpasses it, save, perhaps, the Dutch, which was made subsequently, and profited by the labors of the English translators. But a version may be faithful without being elegant. It may be accurate without adequately representing the riches of the language in which it is made. The glory of the English Bible is that while it conveys the mind of the Spirit with great exactness, it does this in such a way that the book has become the highest existing standard of our noble tongue. Lord Macaulay calls it a stupendous work, which, if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.

It is true that Mr. Hallam (*Literature of Europe*, II, 58) dissents from this view, and seems to regard it as a sort of superstition; but surely he is wrong. The praise of our version is not confined to men of any creed or class, but comes from nearly every eminent critic. Men who differ as widely in other matters as Addison, Swift, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, both the Newmans, and Mr. Ruskin, yet agree on this point; and Mr. Huxley gave voice to a common opinion when he said, "It is written in the noblest and purest English, and abounds in exquisite beauties of mere literary form." It is, therefore, neither prejudice nor thoughtlessness which affirms this book to be the first

of English classics. Indeed, its pages speak for themselves. In simplicity and strength, in the union of Saxon force and Latin dignity, in idiomatic ease and rhythmic flow, they have no superior.

STYLE OF THE VERSION.—Nor is it difficult to account for this. It is true that the style of writing which prevailed among men of letters in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I was not adapted to such composition. In many of these there was a strange fondness for alliteration, antithesis, fanciful analogies, pedantic allusions, and all sorts of conceits. Even Shakspeare has verbal quibbles which “make the judicious grieve.” And when these are avoided, as in Bacon and Raleigh, there is a degree of stiffness, of inversion and occasionally of affectation, which would be an insuperable barrier in the way of popular acceptance and favor. The authors of our Bible seem to have been preserved from this error by a sort of providential preparation. In the course of the religious discussions which prevailed in England from the days of Wycliffe down there had grown up what Mr. Marsh calls “a consecrated diction,” an assemblage of the best forms of expression suited to the communication of sacred truths. This dialect, if one may so style it, avoided equally the pedantry of the schools and the vulgarisms of the market-place. It never crawled upon the ground and never soared in the clouds. It was simple and direct, yet pure and dignified. It was intelligible to all classes, yet offensive to none. It seized as if by instinct the best elements of the vernacular speech, and moulded them into the most suitable grammatical forms; hence it is marked by the absence of book language or “inkhorn terms,” and also of mere colloquial speech. The book was not the production

of a single mind, but of many wise and good men, laboring through a series of years. The earliest and most influential of all was the martyr Tyndale, whose New Testament was issued in 1525. This was followed by Coverdale's Bible (1535), Rogers's (1537), Cranmer's (1539), the Genevan (1560), the Bishops' (1568). At last, in 1611, the final outcome of these years of toil appeared in our present Bible as it came from the hand of King James's translators. During all this period the process of revision went steadily forward, almost constantly gaining in every element of vigor and appropriateness.

AUTHORS OF KING JAMES'S VERSION.—The character of the authors had much to do with the perfection of their work. They were men of learning, judgment and piety, animated only by the sincere desire to render God's most holy Word accessible to all their countrymen. They toiled not for fame or pelf or any party interest, but for God's glory and the souls of men. They were in full and hearty sympathy with the book upon which they wrought. It was the guide of their lives, the arbiter of their differences, the charter of their hope for eternity. They prized it with reverence, they loved it with passion; and because of their devotion to it not a few of them suffered spoiling of their goods, bonds, imprisonments, and exile, and some even death itself. The grave purpose, the intense convictions, of such men lifted them above all puerilities and affectations. It was not for them to seek out artificial refinement or strive to gild refined gold; nor, on the other hand, could they stoop to coarseness or slang. They forgot themselves in their work, and hence the marvellous union it displays, of simplicity and majesty,

homeliness and beauty. "They were far more studious of the matter than of the manner; and there is no surer preservative against writing ill or more potent charm for writing well." (Augustus Hare.) Seeking merely to furnish to their fellows the divine oracles in an intelligible form, they not only did that, but gave to all succeeding generations a masterpiece of English composition, one that shows our language at its best, unfolding its varied resources both of vocabulary and of idiom, and offering many striking specimens of its melodious rhythm.

CONSERVATIVE INFLUENCE OF KING JAMES'S VERSION.—No small regard is due to our Bible for its influence in preserving our language from corruption. Time and again there has been an influx of alien elements introduced by a capricious fashion, or by some able but unwise leader. But amid all the vagaries of popular taste, and the changes occasioned by social revolutions, or the progress of knowledge and discovery, this book has stood like a massive breakwater, unyielding and invincible. Perpetually in the hands of the people, used in public and private worship, resorted to in all controversies, employed in schools and education, in short, a daily companion from the cradle to the grave, it has so shaped the tastes and judgments of men that, however for a time misled, they were always in the end recalled to the older and better model, and renewed their adhesion to the pure "well of English undefyled."

OTHER REVISIONS.—That the book deserves what has been claimed for it is shown by its history. When it first came from the press there were two other versions in general use. One of these, the Bishops' Bible, was

most prized at court and found in all the churches; the other, the Geneva, was cherished in the household and the closet of the middle classes. Now, no royal edict, no decree of convocation, commanded the use of King James's version, yet simply by its own merits it overpowered both these rivals, and, in the course of a single generation, became the accepted book of the entire nation. In after years repeated attempts were made to introduce a new translation; but they all failed, whether put forth by coxcombs, like the man who improved "Jesus wept" into "Jesus burst into a flood of tears," or by profound and elegant scholars, such as Bishop Lowth, or Dr. George Campbell, of Aberdeen. The reason of the failure was not the perfect correctness of the authorized Scripture: no one claims for it any such infallibility. The progress of Biblical knowledge in very many directions has shown the need of much correction. But the gain of the modern versions, in this respect, was so counterbalanced by the loss in style and tone of feeling that the Christian public would none of them; and these amended Bibles, or parts of Bibles, however loudly heralded, or under whatever high names issued, have passed out of recollection, or are consulted only by curious scholars.

PRESENT REVISION.—The same thing is shown by the principles which underlie the revision now going on in England and America. This is a very elaborate enterprise, undertaken under the highest auspices, and representing, as far as possible, all bodies of English-speaking Christians. In these respects it far exceeds anything of the kind ever attempted before. Yet its conductors announce at the threshold that they neither intend nor desire a new translation; that is not needed, and if



accomplished would prove an inevitable failure. All they aim at, therefore, is to make only such corrections as the progress of the language or of Biblical science may render necessary, and in all changes to preserve, as far as possible, the very form and spirit of the existing Bible. Each of them heartily concurs in the judgment pronounced on this point by a late distinguished pervert to Romanism, Dr. F. W. Faber, with whose eloquent and touching words this paper concludes:—

FABER ON KING JAMES'S VERSION.—“Who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvellous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country? It lives on the ear, like music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities often seem to be almost things rather than words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of national seriousness. Nay, it is worshiped with a positive idolatry, in extenuation of whose grotesque fanaticism its intrinsic beauty pleads availingly with the man of letters and the scholar. The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of a man are hid beneath its words. It is the representative of his best moments, and all that there has been about him of soft and gentle, and pure and penitent and good, speaks to him forever out of his Protestant Bible. It is his sacred thing which doubt has never dimmed and controversy never soiled.”