

THE LAMP OF GOD'S WORD.

REV. DWIGHT WILLIAMS.

The shadows fall around us chill and damp,
As toward the morning land we go,
And passes wild we do not know
Before us lea out one hath sent a lamp,
A friendly light,
To guide us through the night.

It leads us as we follow, like a star;
And often where our comrades fall
In gloomy places, as they call
We lend a hand, and bring them back afar,
And from the maze
They go in pleasant ways.

There is a city o'er the desert wide
And we as pilgrims seek its rest;
As strangers in this land confess'd
We journey safely, as our loving guide,
With patient hand,
Leads on o'er rock and sand.

Uncounted throngs have hailed the morn-
ing glow,
And safely passed the dark deniles,
For, like the sunshine with its smiles,
The lamp of life has gleamed on paths
below.

Until they trod
The gardens of our God.

Shine on, O Word of beauty and of light
And lead the nations all one way,
Above their temples in decay
Shine down, and bid their gods in frantic
flight

Return no more,
And Christ be conqueror.

Ah, golden-winged the Word is flying round
The world, a path of sunbeams kissed;
The shadow of the midnight mist
Fades out, and beauty fills the vault por-
foud.

The light is come!
And crosses the azure dome.

—Bible Society Record.

THE OLD WORD AND THE NEW.

Thousands of Englishmen must this week have received a new book which has just been put into their hands with a strangely mixed feeling of eagerness and regret. It is a new book, and yet it is one of the oldest of books. To untold millions of our race every word of it is more or less familiar, and the lives of generations have been moulded upon its words; and yet here it comes to us fresh from the press in a new guise, to be received with eager curiosity wherever it may chance to go. It is, of course, the revised translation of the New Testament of which I am speaking. For more than ten years a company of grave and learned men have been labouring over this book. They have held hundreds of prolonged conferences; they have exhausted not only their own scholarship but all the erudition which was at their command either in the Old World or the New. Compared with the lonely missionaries who under the palm trees of Africa or the crowded pagodas of China have undertaken and accomplished the work of translating the Bible, the "Revision Committee" which has been working since 1870 in the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster seems one of the most formidable instruments of scholarly work the world has ever known. And this powerful body of able men have pursued their work unceasing, unceasing, during all these years. Thousands and millions who were interested in the proposal to give us a new translation of the Bible when it was first made have passed away in the interval, out of the world of printed speech into the dim unknown region where other and letter voices alone make themselves heard. Some of the "Revisionists" themselves have died in the midst of their labours; nearly all have grown old and grey under the burden of their task. And those of us who live now, to receive the book at their hands and to reap the fruit of their labours, cannot but remember the changes that have come over us in these eleven years—perhaps even the

changed feelings with which we now regard the work that interested us then. It is impossible to think of all these things without feeling that there is something very pathetic in this appearance at last of the long expected "revised version" of the New Testament. Like the light of the stars which glittered in our eyes last night, this little book has been on its way to us during long years; and everywhere in every land, in every house, in every heart, there have been changes many and great since it started on its journey in the summer of 1870.

Here it is, however, at last: a neat, cloth-bound, red-edged book, that has little about its outward aspect of that peculiar appearance which ordinarily stamps even the exterior of a copy of the Scriptures in so unmistakable a manner. I do not envy the man who could first take up this new edition of the Old Word without emotion, or with no other feeling than that of mere curiosity. It means so much, this appearance in the world of the first instalment of our new Bible! Two hundred and seventy years have elapsed since the Bible familiar to us all was published. During all that time it has been accomplishing its mission in the world: a mission so high and holy that even the sceptic must feel bound to reverence it. And now—is this little book with its unfamiliar aspect, its novelty of typography, and style and arrangement, its strong resemblance to a college class-book, come to supplant it? Is it to take the place of the Testament we know, of the Book which was familiar to us in the earliest dawn of life, the Book which the dear ones who have gone from us clung to even to the end? As such a thought flashes upon the mind, all the eager curiosity with which a moment ago I stretched out my hand to receive the volume dies away, and in its place my heart is filled with a sudden sense of pain and almost of repugnance. Think that to the generations which are to come the Bible will not be the Bible that we have known, and our fathers and mothers before us—but this strange volume, speaking the old words in a new fashion, wearing a new dress, meant to satisfy a new standard of criticism! The thought of such a thing is novel even to bitterness.

What is this Bible of ours? This is not the place in which, even if one were minded to do so, it would be proper to enter into the subtleties of theological controversy, still less is it the place in which to discuss that criticism which has of late thrown so much light upon the earliest beginnings of Sacred Writ. I am not going to speak of the Vedas of the Hindoos, or the Tripitarka of Buddha, or the Koran of Mahomet. Modern study has thrown a wonderful light upon the primitive religious books of the world; but that study raises problems it would be idle to attempt to discuss here. Nor do I propose to speak of the various versions of the New Testament on which the copy we now possess is based. None but those who are able, by reason both of their learning and their intelligence, to determine accurately the value of the evidence brought forward by contending critics are competent to say anything worth hearing on this point. It is not the New Testament of Origen or of Tertullian, the Alexandrian or the Syriac manuscript, that I am writing about; but the book which has been, in unchanged form, for nearly three centuries in the possession of the English-speaking people of the world; and which is now called upon to give place to a new and closer version of the original, prepared with that laborious care and completeness of conception of which I have spoken.

This Bible of ours has been from the very beginning of life to all of us something more than any other book possibly could be. There is no man or woman among us, however scant may be the reverence with which they now regard it, however slight may be their acquaintance with it, who is not kept in close alliance with it by a thousand invisible ties. For long before any one now living was born, this book was doing its work in England, moulding the thoughts, the sympathies, the very speech of the people. There is not one among us who was not thus born under its influence, with whatever fierceness of revolt he may have struggled against that influence since. Nay, let us say there is no man among us—whatever may be his own idea of the creed he holds—who has not found spiritual life and sustenance and comfort in these holy pages. For the lessons and the influence, the consolations and reproofs of Scripture, have interpenetrated all our literature and all our life; and the most blatant of atheists, the most resolute of sceptics, cannot escape from them even if he would. English literature, English political and social life, English modes of thought and speech, would all be altogether different from what they are if we had no English Bible such as that which has been treasured in our homes for well-nigh three centuries back. It is therefore a change of national importance which is now being made; one that has far more than a merely literary or theological meaning and purpose. This "new version" of the Bible may mean the giving of a new aspect to our national life.

But to the present generation, to the people of to-day, who have this week received the new edition of the Old Word hot from the press, the change has a deeper and closer personal significance. Those of us who have opened the pages of the new version within the last day or two have felt puzzled and bewildered by what we have found there. I have no wish to enter into a critical discussion of the changes that have been made by the Revision Committee; it would be absurd for an unlearned layman to do so. But speaking as one of the multitude, for whose benefit this book has been written and given to the world, and in whose interests this revised translation has been made, I may at least express the surprise and regret with which I see the number and in many cases the trivial character of the alterations that have been made. Where through the carelessness or ignorance of the translators in the time of James the First, an error in the meaning of the word had been allowed to creep in, alteration was clearly necessary, in the interests of truth. But where alterations have been made not in the real sense but in the mere sound of particular passages, in the arrangement of the words or the use of new equivalents for old epithets, I hold that something like an outrage has been committed by the Revisionists. And, unhappily, cases of this kind are by no means rare. I open the new version literally at random, and light upon the opening verses of the 4th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, giving the parable of the sower. This is the form in which they appear in the New Testament as it is now given to us.

"And he began to teach by the seaside and there is gathered unto him a very great multitude, so that he entered into a boat and sat in the sea; and all the multitude were by the sea on the land. And he taught them many things in parables, and said unto them in his teaching, Hearken: Behold the sower went forth to sow: and and it came to pass as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured it. And other fell on the rocky ground where it had not much

earth; and straightway it sprang up because it had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was risen it was scorched; and because it had no root it withered away. And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And others fell into the good ground, and yielded fruit, growing up and increasing; and brought forth thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. And he said, Who hath ears to hear let him hear."

This passage affords a fair example of what has been done by the Revision Committee. Anyone who compares the lines quoted above with the version hitherto in use will see that there is absolutely no difference in the sense of the two translations. The old one was to all intents and purposes perfectly faithful. Yet there is not a verse, there is hardly a clause in the passage in which some trivial and meaningless alteration has not been made. "Fowls of the air" become "birds"; "the whole multitude" becomes "all the multitude"; "and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth" becomes "and straightway it sprang up because it had no deepness of earth." Surely one has a right to complain of the gratuitous and meaningless character of changes of this kind. Granting that the correction of errors in the old version was necessary, this needless removal of words which cling to the memory of all of us, this foolish and fanciful attempt to put the stern, straightforward, often rugged and uncut, but always forcible and self-evident English of the old version into the possibly more elegant but certainly less expressive phraseology of to-day, is most unwise.

For what is it that they have done in thus transforming the Old Word and making it new in this fashion? They have broken a million tender associations, subtle links of memory, by which the hearts of all of us have been bound to the Old Book. What man or woman is there among us who fails to recall the very accents in which the loved lips that will never speak again upon earth uttered those words, tender and merciful and full of comfort, which have now undergone some strange transformation, and are no longer the words we have known and clung to since our childhood? The quaint expressions that were so natural to us in our youth that we never discovered that they were archaic and out of date until we had acquired something of the culture of manhood, were full of a deep inner meaning to most of us. For the Bible has two meanings, two versions as it were, for every man. There is the plain meaning of the words which he shares in common with the rest of the world, and there is that secret inner meaning, born of his own history and experiences, which it has for himself alone. Every chapter, almost every verse, has some strong though secret association with his own life. As he turns its pages his eye lights upon the 103rd Psalm, and in a moment he hears a father's voice reading those words of love and benediction in his old home, the very walls of which are changed and which strangers now possess, on that morning on which as a youth he left it to face the hard outer world and the realities of life. Or he comes to some story in the Divine Life, a story the pathetic tender words of which he must associate for ever with the Sunday evenings when his mother read to him out of these pages in his earliest childhood. The very words of the passage have clung to him ever since; and the mere sound of them suffices to turn back his thoughts for forty years or more to the pure stillness of that Sunday evening. And here is the cry "O, death, where is thy sting? O, grave, where is thy victory?" which has rung in his ears for nearly half a