

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### THE STORY OF THE OLD AND NEW VERSIONS.

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(Continued)

Eleven years have now passed since this work of Bible revision was resolved on. The resolution was adopted at a meeting of the Convocation of Canterbury, the representative body of the Church of England, on the 6th May, 1870. A new version was not contemplated, but simply a revision of the received version. The idea was to take the Authorized Version as the basis and on it to construct the best possible version for the nineteenth century as it was in the seventeenth, making such alterations only as the change of the language and the accumulated additional knowledge of the 270 intervening years warranted. The original Canterbury Committee comprised eight bishops and eight presbyters of the Church of England; but they were empowered to "invite the co-operation of any eminent for scholarship, to whatever nation or religious body they may belong." America has co-operated with England in the work, a true Anglo-American alliance. About one half of the added members of the English Committee were from the Church of England, the remainder were from eminent Biblical scholars outside the English Church throughout the three kingdoms. One hundred and one have been engaged in the work. During the course of it, some have died or withdrawn; of the former, notably Dean Alford in England, and Dr. Erdie in Scotland. Seventy-nine active members of the Committee remain, fifty-two in England and twenty-seven in America, the leading religious denominations being about equally represented in the American section. The New Testament department, the result of whose labours is just being given to the public, has included thirty-six eminent scholars—twenty-one English and fifteen American. In the case of the Authorized Version, but forty-seven in all had to do with the entire book, and these were almost exclusively of the one Church, and their labours extended over about three continuous years. The English New Testament Committee, for ten years, met ten times each year, four days each time and seven hours each day, commencing at 11 a.m. Their first revision of the Greek Text, with the translation, took up six full years averaging forty verses a day each verse and word being carefully and conscientiously examined by the whole Committee. The course commonly pursued at each session, was after prayer and reading the minutes of the previous meeting, to have the verses read in succession from the Authorized Version. Manuscripts on any debatable word were looked into, examined, and their claims weighed, any alterations in the Greek Text were proposed, discussed and voted on, and any changes in the renderings of the English translation a majority deciding. Then revised sheets were then sent across the Atlantic and subjected to the careful, critical review of the fifteen American scholars. They then came back with their criticisms and suggestions to undergo a fresh examination on the part of the Committee in England. At this second review, which extended over two years and a half, all the changes recommended in text or translation were discussed, etc., discussed by the whole Committee and a two-thirds vote of the members present required before any deviation from the Authorized Version could be adopted—a conservative rule which gave a reasonable and proper advantage to our time-honoured version and checked any disposition to meddle with those given to change merely for change's sake, though, in certain instances, it has occasioned the retention of renderings to which a majority objected, and has occasionally sacrificed rigid exactness and technical accuracy for the sake of preserving the familiar rhythm and sacred associations of our dear old English Bible. These detached portions, so soon as they passed a second time from the hands of the English Committee, were sent over again to their learned associates in America, to be by them examined anew and returned with fresh criticisms and recommendations. The revised version, in its complete form, was then subjected to the final review of the American fifteen, such renderings as they preferred, but which did not receive the approbation of their English brethren, will be included in a separate list appended to the edition of the New

Testament just being issued. Everything was thus done that well could be to secure accuracy and harmony in the work. The Revised New Testament comes out as the latest product of the most advanced Biblical scholarship of England and America. By bringing together in the prosecution of a common enterprise leading minds of all the denominations in these two great Protestant countries, it has sowed the seeds of international as well as inter-ecclesiastical comity.

The sessions of the English Committee were held at the Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster Abbey, through the courtesy of Dean Stanley, one of its prominent members. The Chamber is historic, for there, in 1643, met the Westminster Assembly that compiled the subordinate standards of the Presbyterian Church, the Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and there in 1689 convened the commission appointed to revise the Episcopal liturgy. Here died one of England's kings. Here too tarried the remains of some of the most illustrious of English worthies on their way to burial in the sepulchre adjoining. The sessions of the great Westminster Assembly of Divines were much more numerous than those held by the learned body of Scripture Revisers, for they were 1,163 in all, stretching over five years, six months and twenty two days. "Out of these walls (writes Dean Stanley) came the Directory, the Larger and Shorter Catechism, and that famous Confession of Faith, which alone within these Islands, was imposed by law on the whole kingdom, and which alone, of all Protestant Confessions, still, in spite of its sternness and narrowness, retains a hold on the minds of its adherents to which its fervour and its logical coherence, in some measure, entitle it."

When in London, last July, attending the Sabbath School Centenary, Dean Stanley was most kind in acting as guide, for a couple of hours, to a number of the delegates, through that glorious old minster. It was no common honour and privilege to see such a place under such pilotage. The genial Dean verily takes pleasures in her stones, and favours the dust thereof. We commenced our charming pilgrimage at the Charter House, where lies the Doomsday Book and other great historic chronicles on which has gathered the hoar of centuries, and closed it in the Jerusalem Chamber, whose memorabilia he epitomized, and on whose long table were spread the papers—the "books and also the parchments" which the New Testament Revision Committee, then in their one-hundredth session, had just been using. Judge Danforth, of New York, represented by request the Americans, pastors Paumier of France, and Trauve of Sweden, the Continentals, and I, the Canadians in expressing our grateful acknowledgments, and with a few pertinent words from our kind entertainer, and the benediction, pronounced by him, we left that historic chamber, where the standards of our beloved Church were compiled, and around which such historic memories gathered, never again probably to meet, till we meet, let us hope, through infinite grace, in "Jerusalem the Golden." From the Dean, as well as from Dr. Newth, President of the New College, and Chairman of the Congregational Union, one of the lights of English Nonconformity whom I met, I could form some idea of the culture, the catholicity, as well as of the clear, comprehensive, mental calibre of the thirty-six who formed the New Testament Revision Committee. The product of these ten years' labour has this very week been given to the world. The well-known presses of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge have brought them out in the best style, assuming the entire pecuniary responsibility connected with the printing. The learned revisers will take nothing for their pains. Through many channels besides will this new version "run to and fro," and the Divine knowledge it teaches be increased. The new version, though conducted by a constellation of the most eminent scholars both hemispheres can produce, reveals no effort to extort admiration by a display of talent. It professes not to meddle with the old version, save when necessary. The wording and rhythm of the old one is largely adhered to. It is in the paragraph form, the number of the chapters and verses being on the margin. The margins contain also copious notes of considerable interest. The headings of the chapters are left out. There are very few instances of any very important changes. The alterations have respect largely to articles, prepositions, tenses and the like, the definite articles expunged, exchanged for the indefinite, and *vice versa*,

prepositions being interchanged with their fellows, present, past and future tenses shifted about. Obsolete terms are supplanted by those in more familiar use. Short, needless changes are avoided, even in this respect. The old Saxon for the most part is predominant as before. It will give a mighty impetus to Bible reading. In cheap forms, it will be scattered broadcast. Curiosity will combine with other considerations to secure its being perused by many to whom the old version, from very familiarity and use and work, seemed as "idle tales." Time will test its worth. It will be subjected to the criticism of the general scholarship of English Christendom. No doctrine, we are assured, will be displaced. We may find some few passages dropped out. The chief of these have for long not been quoted by scholars, as proof texts at any rate. Their formal omission now will be of no account. No fundamental truth rests on a single text. The question need never be raised. If the foundations be destroyed, what will the righteous do? The foundation of God standeth sure. The word of the Son endureth for ever. If we have to part with one or two familiar passages the arch of truth is not in the slightest affected by their removal. We are all the surer of the material that remains after having been subjected to such repeated reliable tests. We ought to prove all things and hold fast only that which is good.

We have the testimony of leading members of the Board of Revisers to the effect that no truth will be touched by any alterations they have made. Take two from the two countries represented in this great international work. Dr. Angus, of London, England, says: "No Scripture doctrine will be changed; no Scripture precept. Whatever is proved from the old version, will be provable from the new. The Testament will still be the Testament of our youth and our dearest associations. Yet, though doctrines and duties remain, proof passages may change; some withdrawn, some added. There will be changes in words and in turns of expression, in connection of thought, in clearer or more defined meaning, which would be trifling in common books, but are deeply significant when we deal with writings so rich in beauty and in power. The corrections will be chiefly important, because the book is important. But if it be otherwise, if the changes are really important, the force of much of this reasoning will remain. The needed corrections will have been made. We shall know the worst. Uncertainty will have ceased. If the changes are in themselves important we shall be glad to have them. If unimportant, they have still their value. They shew how insignificant the required changes are, while they make clearer the force of some argument, more impressive the beauty of some figure, more sharp and defined the outline of some truth."

Dr. Schaff one of the principal members of the American section of the Revision Committee, says: "No article of faith, no moral principle will be disturbed; no sectarian views will be introduced. The revision will so nearly resemble the present version that the mass of readers and hearers will scarcely perceive the difference, while a careful comparison will shew slight improvement in every chapter and almost in every verse." How far the new version may attain to general currency remains to be seen. At first it will encounter keen opposition, as all changes do. Its alterations will be keenly canvassed. It will be read by the scholar in his study, by many too in the closet, and the family. Ministers will refer to it in expounding. It will be considered in the Church Courts. Should there be a general consensus of the Churches, it will get to be used alongside of the old version for a while, till gradually it takes its place and be publicly authorized. Many will delay action till the whole book appears, which will be four years hence. Manifestly such a change will not be rapid. We have already seen how that, when the Authorized Version appeared, the Geneva, though but half a century old, held its own against it for half a century longer. Our Authorized Version having already existed five times longer, and got so rooted in the English heart and mind, it must be hard to displace it during the present generation. Still, should it meet with general favour, be endorsed by the Churches, and receive the royal imprimatur, it may, sooner than we anticipate, become the authorized version. Nor will it seem as different after all.

The Bible may even yet more speak in our own tongue, where we were born, and we shall still have