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SAINT JOHN, FRIDAY MORNING, APRIL 28, 1911.

THE BIBLE'S LITERARY PRE-EMINENCE.

The celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the publication of the King James version of the English Bible brings forcibly to mind one feature of the Book, viewed as a work of literature, which, while naturally overshadowed by the religious sentiment surrounding it, is well deserving of notice. As a great literary monument of the English language the translation of the Bible made in 1611 still stands alone and without a rival. Wholly apart from what the English Bible has been in the faith and hopes and progress of nine generations, its weaving into the writing and speech and thought of millions of human beings has made it unique and venerable. As an example of pure literature and English style there is nothing to compare with it. There never will be.

Praise for the English of King James' Bible has been often in the mouth of competent and impartial judges. The great cloud of witnesses to it includes not merely preachers and devout women not a few, but poets and orators and critics and statesmen. What forced the ice-cold judgment of Macaulay exalted the supreme, lesser mortals need not be afraid to admire. Ruskin's crowning of the English Bible is well known; Huxley's tribute less so, though even more convincing. It was a Catholic who said that the language of the Authorized Version "lives on the ear like music that can never be forgotten."

So fastidious a critic as Professor Saintsbury has singled out a passage from the Old Testament as the best example known to him of "absolutely perfect English prose." It is the following from the Song of Solomon:

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

How many of the younger generation can claim familiarity with this quotation? How many could even place it? It is to be feared that in these days the old familiarity with the phraseology of the Bible has disappeared or is fast disappearing, and there can be no question that this want of intimate knowledge of this, the greatest of all books, even from purely secular standpoint, is a great loss. The loss is, first of all, as of a key to a great deal of the best in English literature. The Bible is not only a masterpiece itself, it is in-volved in many other masterpieces. Biblical allusions and terms of speech sprinkle the pages of Shakespeare, are as thick in Milton as his own leaves of Vallombrosa, and color the phrase and thought of Tennyson. We remember reading recently of a college examination paper on the latter poet, wherein explanation was asked of Bible incidents and names and idioms adding beauty and significance to his verse. It is unnecessary to say that most of the students miserably failed to pass. What to boys and girls of fifty years ago would have been second nature, is to an appalling number of even well-educated young people today an alien world.

Is there any way of making the literature of the Bible as widely familiar again as it once was? This is a question often asked, not merely by religious teachers, but by those interested in the best secular education. They know how maimed and half-made-up a student of English literature must be unless the lingering charm of Scriptural terms of expression clings to his memory and he has an easy acquaintance with Bible narrative, yet how to prevent the old knowledge from vanishing away is the problem. Modern attempts to solve it have not been highly successful. Formal schemes of Bible study in college or in special literary courses do not seem to meet the case. Students go out from such classes still dull to the stately phrases and the haunting words which a former generation instantly identified with Bible diction.

And the great reason for it, we think, the almost insuperable difficulty, is that a late and literary study of the Bible can never make it the instinctive possession, the man of our counsel, that it was under the old system of assimilating its contents. Assiduous reading in the family from earliest days, the memorizing of Psalm and parable and prophecy and benediction, the listening to the rolling echoes of Sinai in church on Sundays, along with the lightnings and smoke of torment in the Apocalypse—all this was a process to stamp upon the mind indelibly what no amount of sophisticated study can yield. Grant that there was a certain fear in the childish heart as the sacred page was confronted; it was yet a way of sensitizing the photographic plate to make it receive and hold the impression. All this has largely gone, we fear, and with it the intimate knowledge and the swift response which a speaker of years ago could count upon in his audience when he played upon some chord that thrills in the Bible.

To have lost so much of this as our generation confessedly has is little short of an intellectual calamity, and it is to be hoped that the Tercentenary will aid in recovering something of what has slipped from us in knowledge of a book that has for three centuries been woven into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history.

A LONG WINDED JOKE.

Mr. Champ Clark has been busy denying the accuracy of a speech in Missouri in which he reported to have declared that Reciprocity would split Canada in two and make both halves fall into the lap of the United States. He adds that he did not say in this speech that Canada was under the heel of the foreign tyrant, and that it was the policy of the Democracy to get rid of monarchy on this continent and to annex the Dominion.

While accepting Mr. Clark's denials it is not without interest to note that the annexation idea was no sudden inspiration which seized him when he freely expressed his opinions on the subject in the last Congress. From the report of Tariff Hearings before

the Ways and Means Committee on December 6th, 1908, when the Payne-Aldrich Bill was pending in Congress we take the following extract:

Mr. Champ Clark—Nearly all those who are raising wheat in the Northwestern British possessions are Americans who have gone over there, are they not?
Mr. Henry—A great many of them are; yes, sir.
Mr. Clark—Nearly the whole outfit?
Mr. Henry—Yes, sir.

Mr. Clark—Fixing to bring that country into the United States, are they not?
Mr. Henry—I cannot speak for them.
The Chairman—I do not think you ought to give it away if they are.

Mr. Clark—That is exactly what they will do; exactly what they did with Texas.

It was injudicious "to give it away" in 1908; and in the opinion of President Taft it was equally injudicious to give it away in 1911. Hence the humorous interpretation which it was sought to place on the Democratic leader's remarks. For a joker Mr. Clark is a trifle long-winded.

COMPARATIVE COST OF LIVING.

It would seem that at least temporarily a limit has been reached in the hitherto constant increase in the cost of living. Prices of the common necessities of every day life are at last showing a tendency to decline. Bradstreet's elaborate system of calculation, giving the United States prices for ninety-six articles in common use, including provisions, clothing, fuel, building materials and household supplies, shows that prices on April 1 averaged lower than at any previous date since August 1909. A man could buy of these articles for \$8.52 the same quantities which would cost him \$8.69 on March 1, \$8.83 on January 1, and \$9.20 on April 1, 1910. The corresponding price at the beginning of 1910 was \$9.32, which was high-water mark for the era of high prices.

If we go back to 1902 we find the cost of this group of articles at the beginning of the year \$7.60, and in April \$7.78, showing an increase of nine per cent. in the nine years. The April price in 1903 was \$8.12. The next year it had fallen to \$7.57. In 1906 values had gone up to \$8.30, and in April, 1907, to \$8.96, so that prices four years ago were five per cent. higher than they are now. The April price in 1908 was \$8.06, in 1909 \$8.32, and last year, as stated, \$9.20, or some eight per cent. above the present prices. During the first four months of this year the index numbers were as follows: January \$8.84, February \$8.77, March \$8.69, April \$8.52.

These are United States prices, and while they do not in regard to particular articles hold good in Canada, the fluctuations in the whole group follow the same laws. The conclusions reached by Bradstreet's are usually found to agree substantially with those obtained by the Labor Department at Ottawa.

COMMISSION FALLACIES.

The Times is so obsessed with the idea that a commission is the one and only system of civic-government worth considering, that it now proceeds to read Halifax a lecture for adopting the board of control. The weakness of the commission plan is well expressed by the Toronto World which has had occasion to take the Ottawa Free Press to task for holding some equally erratic ideas on the subject.

Says the World:—"In the Ottawa Free Press we find the same stumbling over the commission government idea that befalls all the other people who have been hypnotized by the United States plan of electing commissioners."

"Why elect commissioners when the good old British plan for generations past has been to elect a board whose duties it is to appoint them?"
"We know, dear reader," says the Free Press, "that you yourself could sit down and name five gentlemen who would give us a civic administration in Ottawa immensely superior to any that we have hitherto enjoyed. We know we could."

"That is an admission of the whole case for civic government by commission. If a council or board were elected whose sole duty it would be to pick those commissioners the board would pick the five men the Free Press believes are to be found."

"In Germany it is realized that governing a city is just as much a business as running a railroad or managing a bank or conducting a newspaper. The directors of these corporations are elected by the shareholders, and they pick business men to do business."
No amount of arguing on the part of the Times can prove that the five men who happen to receive the most votes will make the best or even good commissioners. As far as this experiment has gone the evidence is decidedly the other way. Tacoma, which next week will recall four commissioners for graft and incompetence, is the latest example.

Current Comment

(Haverhill Gazette.)

Now is the time to get acquainted with the political system of our lively neighbor on the north. The question of Canadian Reciprocity is the greatest one before the American people. President Taft and Premier Laurier have agreed to lower the tariff barrier between the United States and Canada. The question is: Will the Congress at Washington and the Parliament at Ottawa ratify the agreement? Whether they do or not, Canada is so rapidly increasing in importance that every American ought to add to his knowledge concerning our northern neighbors. How is Canada governed? What are its relations to England? Does Canada cherish hopes of independence? What do Canadians think of annexation to the United States? What is the effect upon Canada of the great tide of immigration pouring in upon its western provinces from the United States? These are a few of the interesting questions of the day, and every American should find the answer.

(Washington Herald.)

Colonel Roosevelt capably expressed the following sentiment as a fundamental condition to the success of any municipal government scheme:—"Don't you ever imagine that you can invent any patent system of government which will work by itself if you don't act the part of good citizens." This is a good elementary thought for all citizens to keep in mind, in view of the wave of reform in municipal administration which is sweeping over the country. We think too much of patent systems in our reforms and too little of the importance of individual conduct.

(Hamilton Spectator.)

The British Empire League has discussed Reciprocity and decided that the only fair thing for the Government to do would be to call a general election on that issue and let the people decide; so do the great majority of the people think, regardless of political leaning.

(Vancouver Province.)

It is perhaps not too much to say that the attitude of the great majority of the public towards the automobile is one of resentfulness. Nor is it altogether surprising that this should be so.

THE TREASURY BOARD MEETING

No Money for Rodney Wharf Re-planking, but Stone Coping will be Provided for Market Square.

At the meeting of the treasury board last evening the question of providing money to re-plank the Rodney wharf was discussed, but left in abeyance pending a detailed report on the condition of the wharf. A motion to provide money to construct a cement coping on Market Square was adopted and the finance officials were authorized to enter into a new agreement with the Canadian Bank of Commerce regarding the redemption of city bonds.

Ald. Hayes presided and there were present Ald. Likely, McGoldrick, Potts and Sproul, with the common clerk, the chamberlain, the comptroller and the recorder. A communication was received from the Canadian Bank of Commerce offering to make a new agreement to handle the city's debentures. The comptroller said the new agreement which the bank proposed was practically identical with that now running. The bank would charge 1/4 of 1 per cent for redeeming the coupons held in other places, and allow a refund on coupons presented for redemption in St. John.

The new agreement would give the city some advantages in the matter of exchange rates and lighten the work of the city officials while affording them a better knowledge of the bank's transactions in reference to foreign bond holders.

An order authorizing the finance officials to enter into the proposed agreement was passed. The chairman stated that the chairman of the board of assessors recommended that the district tax commissioners be paid \$50 on account. He said their year's remuneration ran to about \$200 apiece.

The chamberlain said that last year he had difficulty in getting the commissioners to pay their taxes, owing to the fact that they had been paid in advance.

On motion of Ald. Potts it was decided to pay the tax commissioners \$50 on account with the understanding that enough money should be kept to pay their taxes.

The Rodney Wharf Repairs. Ald. McGoldrick brought up the matter of providing money to re-plank the Rodney wharf. He said the work was necessary, and if not done presently there might be accidents and damage suits against the city.

The chamberlain said there should have been an appropriation in the estimates. The chairman asked whether it would be possible to make temporary repairs of a satisfactory character.

The comptroller said the engineer's department must have known the condition of the wharf because they spent \$2,700 on the wharf last year. He did not see where the money could be obtained. General revenue was over-drawn last year.

Ald. Likely—Can't we make a temporary loan?
The comptroller—That's bad policy. You'd be mortgaging the future. There is no revenue from the wharf, except when a ship comes there to discharge a little ballast.

Ald. Potts said he would like to have the West Side street appropriation to repair the wharf.

The comptroller said the wharf should be regarded as a street. The only way they would get round the difficulty was to charge the cost of renewals to a special account. There might be something left over from the street appropriations at the end of the year.

Ald. Sproul thought temporary repairs ought to do.

Ald. McGoldrick said Mr. Thompson had reported that the planking was had all over, and that he did not think temporary repairs would do.

The recorder remarked that before putting a good top on, they should have a report as to the condition of the understructure.

Ald. Potts said he would like to have the ferry boats run up to King street and do away with the wharf.

Ald. Likely moved that the Board of Works be asked to instruct the engineer to prepare a detailed report on the condition of the wharf, and this was adopted.

The question of providing the money for repairing the wharf was then dropped.

The Market Square Coping. In reply to the chairman Ald. McGoldrick said the proposition of the Arboricultural society to improve the Market square involved a request that the city would spend about \$275 in providing a cement coping round the square.

The Chamberlain said he would endeavor to provide the money.

The Comptroller suggested that they put a street rail above the coping to prevent the heavy teams smashing it. The recorder suggested that the chairman of the Board of Works endeavor to secure tree guards for the trees which the Arboricultural society had planted on Queen's square, Carleton.

Ald. McGoldrick said he thought they could provide the tree guards out of the street appropriations.

Ald. McGoldrick's motion to provide money for the coping on Market Square was adopted by the board which then adjourned.

ICE REPORT.
Halifax, April 27.—Flat Point—close packed ice everywhere, moving southward.
Cape Race—Icebergs everywhere.
Cape Ray—No ice.
D. G. E. "Early Grey" reports lots of heavy ice along Nova Scotia shore from Picton Island westward.



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