

Should the Authorized Version continue to be used in the Public Services of the Church?¹

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PHIL. iii. 20, 21 (A.V.): 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.'

The verses which I have just read, and which form part of the Epistle of to-day, afford two examples of the obscurity and error which have been introduced into the Authorized Version by changes which have passed over the English language since the date, now nearly three centuries ago, at which it was made. We all know what 'conversation' is; but some perhaps even in this cathedral, and certainly many of the numbers who in different churches of our land have heard this Epistle read to-day, do not know that it means here something completely different—something which, without a knowledge of the original Greek, the most intelligent and painstaking reader would be powerless to divine. 'Conversation,' wherever it occurs in the Bible, never means what it means now, *discourse*; it means usually *manner of life, behaviour*, being a Latin representative of *ἀναστροφή* (as in the words of Wesley's familiar anthem, 'So be ye holy in all manner of conversation'); and similarly in the O.T., where it stands for a word meaning 'way,' as in the Psalm which we have just heard: 'To him that ordereth his conversation right will I show the salvation of God.' In the text, however, it does not even correspond to *ἀναστροφή*, but to another Greek word altogether, *πολίτευμα*, and its meaning is either *citizenship* or, better, *constitution*,—so that the apostle's meaning is, the constitution or commonwealth to which we belong is a heavenly one; heaven is the true country of which we are citizens. As it happens, the corresponding verb in the Greek occurs in an earlier part of the same Epistle (1²⁷), in the passage which in the

Authorized Version reads, 'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ,' but in the Revised Version, 'Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,' with the correct explanatory margin, '*behave as citizens* worthily of the gospel of Christ.' It is again the same very suggestive metaphor of a heavenly citizenship which the apostle uses, but which, in the only version which our Church in its official capacity places in the hands of its members,—and at least in the Prayer-Book alone permits to be used,—is, except by a specially trained and educated minority, totally undiscoverable.

The other word, the meaning of which has been changed by time, is the word *vile*,—'our vile body.' There are many places in the Bible in which *vile* is not meant to convey the idea which it now possesses of what is physically and morally detestable, but has simply the force of the Latin *vilis*, properly *cheap*, and then *common*, *lightly esteemed*, or at most *looked down upon*;² and this, no doubt, is the sense which the Translators of 1611 intended to express here; for the Greek is *ταπεινῶσις*, *lowliness, low estate*—as it is rendered in the *Magnificat*, 'the lowliness, or low estate, of his handmaiden'; and the contrast is simply between the lowly earthly body which we at present bear, and the future glorified body which has been made like unto the risen body of Christ.

The two examples which my text has afforded are but specimens which might be almost indefinitely multiplied, of cases in which—partly through the imperfect scholarship of the seventeenth century, partly through the changes which many English words have passed through since—the Authorized Version entirely fails to convey to the reader of the present day the meaning of the original; or even, where the word employed is not actually obsolete, does what is perhaps worse—suggests a wrong meaning altogether. Some of the commonest words in our language, such as

¹ The opening paragraphs of a sermon preached in the Cathedral, Oxford, on the Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity, 1901.

² See Dt 25³ (the same Hebrew word is in 1 S 18²³ rendered *lightly esteemed*); Job 40⁴ (R.V. *am of small account*); Jer 15¹⁹ (= *common*); Lam 1¹¹.

health, and *wealth*, and *strange*, and *tempt*, mean now something quite different from what they did in 1611, and wherever they occur must, to most readers, suggest inevitably a false meaning. And there are other passages, probably still more numerous, and certainly including many important ones, the true meaning of which is never heard in our public services, on account of their being incorrectly rendered in the Authorized Version. A well-known but seriously mistranslated text occurred only two Sundays ago in the first lesson of the morning service (Dn 3²⁵).¹ Instances of mistranslation are most frequent and glaring in the Epistles of the N.T. and in the poetical and prophetic books of the O.T., but they occur also often besides. Nor do they relate to points of merely antiquarian or philological interest; they relate often to important points of Christian doctrine, and they frequently have the effect of obscuring an argument, and of blunting, or even destroying altogether, the force, and life, and expressiveness of the word or figure employed by the biblical writer. Surely the time has come for these things to be changed. It surely needs no argument to show that the Bible and Prayer-Book, which our Church places in the hands of its members, ought to be written throughout in a language 'understood of the people,' in a language which ordinary lay readers can follow and comprehend without difficulty. And the Bible, and not less the extracts from the Bible contained in the Prayer-Book, should also be placed in their hands in a translation which is accurate and trustworthy. We live in a city in which there are many teachers and

¹ The *Speaker's Commentary*, published now twenty-five years ago, makes here the required correction.

tutors; and it may be safely said that there is not a single teacher here who, if it were necessary for his pupils to read a work written in some foreign language, would recommend to them a translation which he knew to abound in inaccuracies and obscurities; he would, we may be sure, if the work were an important one, take steps to provide a trustworthy translation himself. Our Church, strange to say, seems to be less careful, less anxious, in making provision for an accurate knowledge of the Bible than any teacher of a secular subject would be. Else how comes it that it persists in withholding from the laity renderings which are confessedly the correct ones, and which in any commentary taken at random are without hesitation recognized as such? It is surely a duty of the Church to take care that in all its public services the Bible should be read in the best translation which the scholarship of the day can provide, in a translation free from the defects which, arising from the causes that I have briefly indicated, so constantly make the Authorized Version, in spite of its inimitable literary excellences, obscure, inaccurate, and misleading. Is it too much to ask of the authorities of the Church that they should either sanction and encourage the public use of the Revised Version, or, if in their opinion this is not sufficiently good, that they should lose no time in taking measures to provide a version which is better?²

² The Bishops, it is right to say, have sanctioned the public use of the Revised Version, though hitherto, it is to be feared, with little effect; and the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury, which in 1870 nominated the original Revision Companies, has taken no action in the matter.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Arabia Before Islam.¹

THIS pamphlet (35 pages long) forms part of a series of sketches published by the Vorderasiatische Gesellschaft with the title 'The Ancient East.' The author summarizes the history of the collection and deciphering of the S. Arabian inscriptions,

¹ *Arabien vor dem Islam*. Von Dr. Otto Weber. Williams & Norgate.

and endeavours to put in an intelligible form the chief results of Sabæan studies. His style is lucid and easy; he is thoroughly familiar with his subject, for which he has had access to sources of information that are not yet open to the public. It is well known that the *animi caelestes* engaged on the study of S. Arabian antiquities are not free from the *iræ* which Virgil thought incongruous in such cases. In Glaser's numerous and valuable