

The "Failure" of the Revised Version.

I.

By the Right Rev. B. F. WESTCOTT, D.D., D.C.L.,
Bishop of Durham.¹

It is natural that I should say a few words upon the resolution which has been brought before us, though the Bishop of Wakefield has rightly anticipated my judgment. It was my privilege to spend a considerable part of the ten most vigorous years of my life upon the revision of the New Testament. No one can know better than I do the imperfections and the inequalities of the work. I could criticise it more thoroughly, I think, than many of its critics. But when account is taken of every fault, I cannot but regard the result of that period of anxious labour with the deepest satisfaction and thankfulness. The Revision has brought, as I believe, the words and thoughts of the Apostles before English people with a purity and exactness never attained before. I have no intention of following the Bishop of Wakefield into the mass of details which he has brought before us in his paper. This is not the place, I think, for doing so, and I have considered them elsewhere with adequate illustrations. I will only say that few of the "trivial and unnecessary" changes which have been recited would arrest the attention of hearers or readers, as I know by actual experience; and every change, even the least, admits of an explanation on an intelligible principle if there were time for discussion here. Nor again do I wish to speak of the revised text which underlies the Revised Version. I must, however, emphatically decline to accept the title which has been given me as "one of the editors of the text." I certainly have paid some attention to textual criticism, and I have very distinct opinions as to the special problems offered by the text of the New Testament; but the text of the Revisers does not represent the peculiarities of my own personal opinion. The variations from the received text which the Revisers adopted, for they did not form any continuous text, are, speaking generally, those on which all scholars who think that the text of the apostolic writings must be dealt with on the same

critical principles as classical texts would substantially agree. Again and again I declined to propose or to support a change of reading which I held myself to be unquestionably true, because it was not recommended by that general consensus of scholars which I felt bound to seek in loyal obedience to my commission.

Perhaps I may be allowed to add one other remark before I touch on the main subject of the resolution. A contrast is frequently made, as we have heard just now, between the extent of change made by the Revisers of the Old and New Testaments, and even as to the fidelity with which they followed their instructions. The contrast is, unless my observation is at fault, illusory. Critics commonly forget that there are practically no various readings in the Old Testament, and very few parallel texts. If we take away the changes in the New Testament due to changes of reading and parallelisms of language, the alleged disproportion will cease to exist. At least I can say that every kind of change which has aroused antagonism in the revised New Testament is found, and is found most rightly, in the revised Old Testament. But changes in the one are more obvious than changes in the other.

If now I turn to the general character of the revision of the New Testament, which is the main question before us, I think that I may say that the one desire of the Revisers was to give the most exact and faithful rendering they could of the text before them. In this they followed the aim and the pattern of their predecessors, whose style and vocabulary and rhythm they strove to preserve with the most scrupulous care, and not, I think, wholly without success; for I remember well that when some change was proposed at our third revision in the printed text which was then before us, a pathetic plea was urged "that we should not disturb the exquisite language of the old version," which only dated in fact from the first revision, six or seven years before. But fidelity, as the Bishop of Manchester has pointed out, required a strict adherence to definite principles. It was not for us to decide by any arbitrary and varying judgment on the importance of changes. Our duty was to place the English reader as nearly as possible in

¹ The Bishop of Durham has sent us the following corrected report of his recent speech in Convocation.

the position of the reader of the original text. It was not for us to leave or to introduce differences or identities in the English which were not in the Greek : to hide parallelisms in cognate narratives, or to create them. Patient students of the New Testament will, I think, agree that they have not found any commentary so fruitful as a concordance, and our desire was to enable the English student to use his concordance with like effect. It was no wonder, then, if on thorough many-sided investigations 75 changes grew to 127. Unexpected parallelisms or variations of language had to be noticed. Corresponding phrases had to be considered. Minute variations of order had to be noticed.

These, it is said, are trivialities. Let me at once say that I do not presume to say so. In themselves, taken separately, they may be ; but they are not trivialities as links in a chain ; they are not trivialities as faithful applications of an acknowledged principle. The spelling of a name—Colossæ or Colassæ—may give important testimony. In any case our opinion as to what is important differs very widely. To my mind some of the trivialities which have been quoted are full of teaching to the simple reader, if only he will seek for the answer to the question which they suggest.

Let me give three simple examples to illustrate my meaning. The newspapers gave most kindly attention to the Revision on the day after its publication. One change, I remember, called out pretty general condemnation. "The two *thieves* had become," so the critics said, "two *robbers*. What lamentable pedantry. What good can come of it?" What good? Were we to say, "Now Barabbas was a — *thief*"? Were we to obscure the significant trait which indicated the social state of Palestine? Were we to destroy the tragic contrast between the lawless violence of the brigand and the self-surrender of the true King? Were we to put out of sight, as far as we could, the false spirit which was betrayed by "the people's choice"? Whatever critics might say, the translators' obligation was clear, and now perhaps it is acknowledged. No doubt the use of the preposition "in," to which the Bishop of Wakefield has referred, is often unexpected. It corresponds with a mode of viewing things which is not our own, and therefore may be, I will venture to say, of greater moment to us. No one, I imagine, will propose to alter the familiar phrase, "In Him we live, and move, and have our

being." No one will say that "through Him" would be a better rendering. And if so, I am at a loss to understand how any one can hold that it is a matter of indifference whether we say "In Him were all things created" or "by Him." Have we a right to limit a divine relation? Is it again a matter of indifference whether we say "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus" or "through Christ Jesus"? To me, I confess, it makes a fundamental difference in the whole conception of Christianity whether we regard life as something which Christ has won for us apart from Himself, or something which is absolutely bound up with Himself, and only realised in vital fellowship with Him. And I shall hold ten years of my life well spent if I have been enabled to help in any degree in bringing this thought home to English-speaking people in years to come. The phrase represents, if you please, a Hebrew idiom—a Hebrew mode of conception. What then? It was the mode of conception which God was pleased to choose for conveying His truth to the world. Let it, then, be carefully guarded. Let it be faithfully rendered. Let it be offered to our common people, that they may, by patient reflection, grasp the fulness of the lesson. Let me give yet one other illustration. Dean Burgon, I am told, made himself very merry over the rendering (in 2 Peter i. 7), "adding, in your love of the brethren, love." I am not aware that he took any trouble to understand it. It was enough that beautiful music was spoiled. I say nothing as to the music of the revised rendering, but I do say that the rendering gives us the characteristic truth of Christian morality. I do say that it sets out plainly what was put out of sight before, that love, the feeling of man for man as man, finds, and can only find, its true foundation in the feeling of Christian for Christian, realised in and through the Incarnation of the Word. And I cannot understand how any faithful translator, yielding to charm of rhythm or old associations, could dare to hide from his countrymen the lesson which he had himself once learned.

Such illustrations, and they could be multiplied indefinitely, will, I hope, throw some light on the problems, subtle and far-reaching in their applications, which were continually forcing themselves upon the attention of the Revisers in the progress of their work. So it was borne in upon them that their one aim should be to give English readers,

as far as might be, the very words of the apostles. "Read his own words," was the bidding of Archbishop Whately, in the agony of his last illness, to his chaplain, who read to him the phrase, "Who shall change our vile body." "Read his own words;" and we can feel that if "the body of His humiliation" is a Hebrew idiom, it is one pregnant with meaning for us. Does the title "the Son of His love" add nothing to the words "His dear Son?" Is "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God" quite the same as "the glorious gospel"? I venture then to say that the selection of changes judged to be important would involve a complete sacrifice of the fundamental principle of fidelity to which the Revisers were pledged.

Such a selection is also undesirable. The Revision stands, as a whole, executed, with whatever imperfections it may have, on clear and definite lines. As a whole, it ought to be dealt with and judged. Minor changes justify greater. Greater changes throw light upon minor. Let the whole have time to produce its full effect, and I have no fear for the issue. A review is said to have killed it. I can see no signs of death. Its influence—I speak of the New Testament only—spreads silently and surely on every side. I rarely hear a sermon in which it is not quoted. It is read publicly, and welcomed, as I have been told, in some churches. There are, I imagine, few Bible classes and schools in which it is not habitually used. The acceptance which it has received has been beyond my expectation, and, as I believe, beyond the acceptance of the Revision of 1611 in the same time. A distinguished Dean of the seventeenth century said, as we remember, that he would sooner be torn to pieces by wild horses than have a share in that Revision, which only came into general use as the Authorised Version after fifty years and a revolution. I am content, then, to appeal to the next generation for a just judgment on the new Revision.

The resolution before us is in my opinion impracticable and undesirable; and I will go further and add, that it is for the object aimed at unnecessary. I am not aware of any documentary evidence that the Revision of 1611 was ever formally authorised by king or convocation. I know of no evidence whatever that it was formally authorised for exclusive use. I believe that it won its way slowly by its own merits. After the Restoration the Bishops generally required its use in churches at their visitations, but not generally till then. For

some time after its appearance, for twenty years or more, the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible held their place beside it. Preachers like Andrewes and Laud, even when preaching before the king, took their texts from other sources which differed widely from it. The concurrent use of different versions seems strange to us, but it did not seem strange then. The Prayer-Book Psalter was taken from the Great Bible, and the Epistles and Gospels were or might be taken from the same version till the Restoration. Even now our Prayer-Books contain three distinct types of Bible rendering in the Psalms, in the Epistles and Gospels, in the Canticles, and the passages in the Communion Service. And the Bishop of Liverpool, who is inclined to doubt whether this concurrent use of different versions would have a good effect, may remember that Gregory the Great, in his memorable Commentary on Job, says expressly that he shall use both the Latin versions in his work, following the custom of his See. Indeed, I know nothing more likely to lead to an intelligent study of Holy Scripture than the use of a "Parallel Bible." I am content to wait for the result of such study.

Meanwhile, I am not prepared to make the study impossible by offering a revision essentially fragmentary and inconsistent. I cannot venture to choose, either in Holy Scripture or in any version of Holy Scripture, details which I regard as important to the disregard of others. This phrase or that may seem to me to be strange or uncouth, but I have a limited and imperfect vision. Let me then strive with absolute self-control and self-surrender to allow apostles and evangelists to speak in their own words to the last syllable and the least inflection, in Hebrew idiom and with Hebrew thought. Let them so speak, and let us humbly wait till in God's good time we are enabled to read the fulness of their meaning in our own tongue. I know no way in which we can understand the meaning of a message except by the patient observance of the exact words in which it is conveyed.

II.

By the Rev. R. BRUCE, D.D., Huddersfield.

I seldom use the Revised Version either in private or in public, except for reference on doubtful and difficult passages. Perhaps once a month in chapel I read the New Testament lesson from it.

I scarcely ever hear a word of approval or disapproval as to the difference between old and new versions. To sum up my opinion on the Revised Version. The Old Testament translators have been *too conservative*, and have refrained from making a good many alterations justified, if not demanded, by grammatical interpretation of the text, and necessary to make the meaning intelligible to ordinary readers. The New Testament translators have been too revolutionary, making a large number of minor alterations, specially in prepositions and tenses and articles, which were not necessary even with exact scholarship. And they seem to have gone on the presumption that these illiterate men were not only acquainted with the classical usage of words, idioms, and particles, but uniformly used them in their exact and most correct fashion.

I used to read the Revised Version of the New Testament more frequently than I do now, for I found that some of the readings grated very much on the ear and sense of the congregation as well of myself, as lacking in the beauty of the old rhythm, and some of the translations appeared to me neither grammatically nor theologically good. There is a lack of uniformity in altering or retaining old words; e.g. they have altered "prevent" to "precede," "let" to "hinder," etc., and occasionally "minister" to "attendant." But they retain the old word in Matt. xx. 26, which is always disagreeable to me in public reading from the pulpit, "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your *minister*."

The dead-set against "doctrine," for which "teaching" is substituted; against "imputation," for which they use "reckoned"; and "miracles," for which they use "signs," seems to indicate a theological bias, which I believe did not exist; so also against "conversion." And yet in every one of these cases they are not uniformly consistent; they still retain here and there all these words, and one cannot see why, if they are retained once or twice, they might not have been retained more frequently, or been disused altogether. The minute alterations of the prepositions "in" and "with" are frequently very questionable. The attempt to enforce the exact meaning of the *tenses* according to classical Greek, and to translate always the definite *article*, or insert an indefinite article where none had previously been in use, in many instances destroys the meaning. In some cases, no doubt, the alterations greatly improve the

meaning. It should have been borne in mind that most of the sacred writings were written by men of limited education, as a popular book for the unlearned as well as scholars; and, therefore, more latitude must be given in the interpretation than a rigid and modern grammarian would permit. I am bound to confess that in preaching up and down the country, while many of my younger brethren use almost always the Revised Version. I generally find a copy of the Revised Version in the pulpit, and in some few cases no other copy, which is a greater mistake than to have no copy of the Revised Version and only the old. I am inclined to think that the Revised Version will prepare the way for a Re-revised Version, which will be more generally used than either old or new.

III.

By the Rev. JOHN TAYLOR, D.Lit., M.A.,
Borrowdale Vicarage, Keswick.

From the date of its publication I have made the fullest possible use of the Revised Version, and therefore with much pleasure do I state the result.

1. It has appeared to me that the new version was extremely useful in Bible-class teaching. Those who attend such classes readily catch the points of difference between the old translation and the new. I shall not soon forget the gratification experienced by the members of such a class on a Sunday afternoon some eight years ago, when the teacher, in rapid survey, brought out the meaning of the changes which have been made in Phil. i.

2. If there are intelligent domestics in the household, the reading of the Revised Version at family prayers is not without influence. In my own household a maid-servant thought that it could not be the Bible which was being read. She, therefore, occupied herself on the following Sunday with reading the chapters which had been used during the week, and found that she now understood these better.

3. In church the Revised Version is habitually quoted, and the employment of it more or less directly recommended. So far as I can judge, the recommendation is not largely followed. In the village where I minister, the schoolmaster makes frequent use of the new translation, but, whilst obtaining light on the meaning, is repelled by the

language in which that meaning is expressed. This aversion, he assures me, is felt by every one with whom he has conversed on the subject.

On the whole, I should not be at all disposed to the opinion that the Revised Version has failed. Many people who do not like it learn much from it. And it is a great advantage to the teachers of religion to have even a quasi-authoritative new rendering, by means of which they can break the chains of habit and compel their hearers to go behind the mere words of the Bible to its thoughts.

IV.

By the Rev. HERBERT DALE, M.A.,
Radclive Rectory, Buckingham.

I set a high value on the Revised Version. I almost always use it at family prayers, for my own private reading, and in expository sermons in church, and for "Bible-readings" purposes; and I advise young people to bring it to church with them, and use it while the lessons are being read from the Authorised Version.

Together with its marginal readings, I find it for purposes of private study the most useful, I think, of textual commentaries. When one reads for pleasure, the distribution of the text into paragraphs, and the printing of the New Testament in the big editions right across the page like an ordinary octavo book, instead of in two columns, makes it much easier than an ordinary Bible to read with intelligence and enjoyment; and in church it is a great help to be able to take one of the lessons for the day, or the Epistle, or Gospel, or a Psalm, and point out in the course of one's sermon any important variations between the Authorised Version and it.

Sentiment dies hard;—it is a matter of dispute, I suppose, among experts whether such weight should have been attached to the uncials as the Revisers seem to have attached; but, speaking just as an average Bible reader, I should fearlessly say that it was one of the most useful additions—that it was the most useful addition—I know of in my personal, practical experience to one's opportunities of understanding and enjoying the reading of the Bible in English, and throws a flood of light to the ordinary reader who has not time to be a scholar on the meaning of both the Old and the New Testament.

V.

By the Rev. WILLIAM BULL, B.A.,
Sutton-in-the-Elms, near Rugby.

It is undeniable that the Revised Version of the Scriptures has not been received with the interest and enthusiasm that might have been expected; but I should hesitate to say that the work was a failure. There are many persons who use it and find great help from it.

There are some reasons which might be given that will, in part, account for its not being more widely popular.

There are many persons, perhaps the majority, untroubled by biblical or theological difficulties, who find the Authorised Version sufficient for the wants of their spiritual life. Sacred associations cluster round the old familiar words and sentences of the Authorised Version, and give them a charm which is wanting to a new rendering. On this ground I suppose we should object to a revised *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Paradise Lost*.

Besides this, the changes made to correct mis-translations or to give the meaning of English words now obsolete or employed in a different sense, have been frequently referred to in sermons and expositions, so that there is nothing strikingly new to intelligent readers. Amongst these I have heard expressions of surprise that there was so little in the Revised Version that was new to them.

Again, changes have been made which seem to be trivial, and an unnecessary interference with familiar words. The expression (1 Pet. i. 8), "Whom having not seen, ye love," changed in the Revised Version to "Whom not having seen, ye love," is an example. Other changes have been made which are certainly not improvements. It is difficult to believe that they represent the original words. Compare the readings of the Authorised Version and Revised Version of Rom. viii. 39.

Whilst the Revised Version is very useful to intelligent students of the Scriptures, it may be long before it shall supersede the Authorised Version in common use.

VI.

By the Rev. W. HACKNEY, M.A., Birmingham.

I should not like to be without the Revised Version, both in private and public use. I generally study from it myself, but in the read-

ings of public worship select whichever I think is the better version of the passage. *Any* translation must be open to many objections. This no doubt represents considerable compromise. I am not sure that it is very widely valued amongst non-students. The old familiar text keeps its place.

VII.

By the Rev. Professor JOHN KENNEDY, D.D.,
Hampstead.

Your question needs definition. What is meant by failure? That the Revised Version has failed so to commend itself to the common, or even the educated, mind, that the English-speaking people would be willing to accept it as an Authorised Version, I believe. And yet I am not entitled to say more than that this is my impression. I think it can scarcely be doubted that there is a feeling of considerable disappointment in regard to it. This, however, may be ascribed, not so much to any demerits of the version, as to the unreasonable, I may say the impossible, expectations which were very commonly entertained. People expected a very great change, almost a new translation, and yet they expected that their traditional affection for the old words would suffer no wound. And they are disappointed in both.

As to the real merits of the Revised Version, *quot homines tot sententia*. But it has certainly contributed largely to the better understanding of

many passages. And when a further revision is attempted—the time is distant, no doubt—the labour and learning expended on this version will be found to have not been in vain.

VIII.

By the Rev. Principal F. W. AVELING, M.A., B.Sc.,
Independent College, Taunton.

In my Bible class I use both the old version and the new. I give the altered new versions, when they are of any importance, to the boys (who mainly have the old version). Sometimes I tell them I think the new version is no improvement. *The great drawback to the new is its want of references.*

IX.

By the Rev. NEWMAN HALL, LL.B., D.D.,
Christ Church, Lambeth.

I daily use the Revised Version in my study, and value it more than I can express. He who, ignorant of Greek, consults it, is in a better position than those who consult their own very superficial knowledge of the original. So many varying opinions of learned men — and the marginal suggestions—all indicate that a *re-revision* would result in a well-nigh perfect book.

In public I use the Authorised Version, as more familiar and musical, and better recognised by the multitude.

The Scapegoat—Barabbas.

BY THE REV. A. H. WRATISLAW, M.A.

“Now every feast he used to release unto them one prisoner, whom they asked of him. And there was one called Barabbas, lying bound with them that had made insurrection, men who in the insurrection had committed murder. And the multitude went up and began to ask him to do as he was wont to do unto them. And Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he perceived that for envy the chief priests had delivered Him up. But the chief priests stirred up the multitude, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate again answered and said unto them, What then shall I do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify Him. And Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out more exceedingly, Crucify Him.

And Pilate, wishing to content the multitude, released unto them Barabbas, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified.”—MARK xv. 6-15 (and parallel passages in Matthew, Luke, and John).

I BELIEVE it was in 1843 that a friend heard and detailed to me a sermon preached by the late Mr. Melvill on Good Friday, in which he contended (1) that the importance of the ceremonies of the day of atonement in the Jewish economy was so great, that they *must* have had their counterpart somewhere in the actual history of the Saviour; and (2) that the account of the