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The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament

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souri areas and supplied by pastors from the Ohio Synod Seminary. This period terminated with the defection of Ohio, taking most of the English congregations together with their pastors into the Ohio Synod, with attending discouragement as to English work in the areas thus affected. The third period began with the organizing of the English Synod of Missouri in 1889. During this third, more recent, period, the congregations of the English District have been organized, and most of the German congregations have taken up English preaching either alongside of the German or exclusively. For all practical purposes the Synod of Missouri is now an English-speaking body.

Pittsburgh, Pa. —————

The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*

By W. ARNDT

This publication comes to us with the legend on the publisher's jacket: "The most important publication in 1946." At first one may be taken aback by such a strong and apparently daring claim, 1946 having only begun; but a little reflection will lead one to say that here we are not dealing with an exaggeration, such as publishing houses are fond of voicing, but with a truly objective evaluation. A new and at that somewhat official translation of the New Testament—what more important work can there appear in this year of grace?

In a pamphlet entitled *An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*, written by members of the revision committee, authoritative information is submitted on the origin and the nature of this new version. It will be recalled that the Authorized Version was revised by a committee consisting of British and American scholars, and that this revision appeared in 1881. The American scholars

* The New Covenant Commonly Called the New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Revised Standard Version. Translated from the Greek, Being the Version Set Forth A.D. 1611, Revised A.D. 1881 and A.D. 1901. Compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1946. Thomas Nelson & Sons, New York. 553 pages 5x7½. Price, \$2.00.

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belonging to the committee disagreed in a number of instances with their British colleagues, and they issued their own version in 1901, which came to be known as the American Standard Version. In England the Revised Version did not succeed at all in supplanting the Authorized Version of 1611. In America the developments were somewhat different: The American Standard Version was adopted by many congregations as their authoritative translation of the Scriptures and was widely used in and outside the pulpit. But the wish of the promoters to have it adopted by all Protestant churches of America was not realized. Various factors were responsible for this result. The Authorized Version had so endeared itself to English-speaking people that they did not like to see it dislodged. Sentiment was strongly on the side of the old version. Besides, it could not be denied that the changes which had been introduced often destroyed the rhythm, majesty, and force of the 1611 rendering. An old castle had been modernized, and the outcome was a building which was useful for living purposes, but whose original charm had departed. The American Standard Version was scholarly, accurate, an excellent guide for the student, especially one who was not well versed in the original tongues, because it was quite literal, but its aesthetic qualities were not equal to those of the old translation. The Bible-reading public instinctively clung to the A. V. It was freely acknowledged that the archaisms of this version, the mistranslations found in it, and the progress in the field of textual criticism made a new translation very desirable, but while in these respects the American Standard Version, generally speaking, fulfilled the requirements, there was something lacking in its style that prevented its becoming the people's Bible.

In the version before us the attempt is made to keep all the good features of the American Standard Version without sacrificing the grand stylistic attributes that made the King James Version an English classic and, besides, an ideal book for public and private ownership.

The history of the present translation begins in 1928, when the copyright of the American Standard Version was transferred to the International Council of Religious Education, which is made up of the educational boards of forty Protestant denominations in the United States and Canada.

This council appointed a committee which was entrusted with such work as the text might require, including a revision if this should be considered necessary. It was stipulated that no changes should be made unless favored by at least two thirds of the membership of the committee. The work was started in 1930. The depression caused an interruption which lasted from 1932 to 1937. In the latter year the required funds were on hand, and the work could be continued. Naturally the committee was divided into two sections, one for the Old and the other for the New Testament. The Old Testament section, will, so it is hoped, complete its work by 1950.* The scholars who are responsible for the New Testament version now lying before us are: Prof. Walter Russell Bowie, Union Theological Seminary; Prof. Millar Burrows, Yale University; Prof. Henry J. Cadbury, Harvard University; Prof. Clarence T. Craig, Oberlin Graduate School of Theology; Prof. Edgar J. Goodspeed, University of Chicago; Prof. Frederick C. Grant, Union Theological Seminary; Prof. James Moffatt, Union Theological Seminary (died 1944); Dean Luther A. Weigle, Yale University Divinity School; President Abdel Ross Wentz, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Dean Weigle served as chairman of the committee.

In placing the work before us, the publishers remark, "The Publishers and the committee have made every effort to present this version in the most satisfactory format. The paragraphing is logical. Punctuation is modern and sensible. Poetry is printed as such. Cross references and occasionally necessary notes appear at the bottom of the page. The page size, the type, the length of type line, the margins, the styling of the type page—all have been chosen after consultation with competent typographers and book designers. The result is a volume beautifully appropriate to the presentation of God's Word." All these claims are justified: the book is beautiful to behold, a triumph of the printer's art, and of convenient size for the reader.

With much interest one reads about the methods followed by the committee in its work. Thirty-one meetings were held, every one of which on an average lasted from four to five days. As a rule, morning, afternoon, and evening sessions

* We are happy to state that our esteemed colleague Dr. G. V. Schiek is one of the advisers of this section.

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took place, each one three hours long. When a committee member had been assigned a New Testament book for translation, he made a preliminary draft and sent a copy to all the other members. At the next meeting of the committee his draft was scrutinized. Dr. Moffatt, who served as secretary, then made another draft of the translation, incorporating the alterations that had been adopted. The corrected version was again submitted to all the members of the committee. At the next meeting a further opportunity for emendations and corrections was given. It is evident that painstaking labors of the highest order went into the making of this New Standard Version.

Since Moffatt and Goodspeed, both eminent scholars, had issued translations of the New Testament of their own, one is curious to know whether the peculiarities of their personal versions have gained admittance in this revision. With satisfaction one finds that, as a rule, such is not the case. Moffatt's entirely inexcusable mistranslation of the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, which changed them into saying, "Take and eat this, it means My body," and Goodspeed's wrong rendering of the term "righteousness of God" in Romans, which he translates "the uprightness of God," are not repeated in this work. Seeing this, the reader begins to entertain the assurance that idiosyncrasies were suppressed and that not brilliant originality, but rather faithfulness to the text was the ideal which the committee sought to achieve.

That the planned return to the simplicity and force of the Authorized Version was accomplished, an example or two will readily demonstrate. The Foreword of Luke's Gospel reads in the new version: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were told to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." In the American Standard Version the translation of this Foreword had read: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they told them to us, who from

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the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed." In general, the Revised Standard Version rendering strikes one as far more virile and smooth than that of the American Standard Version. It is true that in one point the latter translates correctly and the Revised Standard Version incorrectly: *ἀνωθεν* does not mean "for some time past," but "from the first." Apart from this error, the superior excellence of the new rendering is evident.

To enter upon further details, one notices at once that the archaic forms of the pronouns "thou," "thee," "ye," have almost disappeared. "Thou" and "Thee" are retained when the Deity is addressed, though they are not used when Christ is spoken to. The seventeenth century verb forms are modernized. (It seems, however, that now and then consistency has been violated; for instance, in the quotation given Gal. 4:27 "thou" occurs twice in words not forming an address to the Deity. If the intention was to use the archaic pronoun in quotations from the Old Testament, this apparently was forgotten in Heb. 12:15. The verb forms have been given their modern appearance except when accompanying "Thou," but in Gal. 4:27, strange to say, "hath" has not been eliminated).†

The expressions that make present-day readers of the A. V. stumble have been altered, as they had been before in the A. S. V. With approval one observes that "bowels of mercies," Col. 3:12, has become "compassion"; "prevent," 1 Thess. 4:15, has become "preceding"; "let," 2 Thess. 2:7, has become "restrain." Here we ought to mention, too, that the long sentences of the A. V. often have been broken up into smaller parts, so that the meaning is more easily apprehended. We believe that the Epistles of St. Paul will now be read with far more satisfaction and profit by our laymen who have not made a professional study of the Holy Scriptures.

With amazement the reader finds that Moffatt's strange

† After this, abbreviations will be used for the three versions with which we are concerned: A. V. = Authorized Version; A. S. V. = American Standard Version; R. S. V. = Revised Standard Version.

rendering of "elements of the world" (A. V.) in Gal. 4:3, which he in his own version translated "elemental spirits of the world," has been taken over. The A. S. V. had rendered "rudiments of the world," which was quite acceptable. One is glad to see that Heb. 4:14, which in the A. V. reads that Jesus "has passed into the heavens," in the R. S. V. reads "has passed through the heavens." It is a correction which had been adopted in the A. S. V.

It is with regret that we see that the wrong, or at least ambiguous, translation of Jude 4 has not been altered sufficiently to remove the unsatisfactory feature. In speaking of the false teachers, Jude, according to the A. V., says that they were "ordained to this condemnation." The R. S. V. takes virtually the same view of the passage, rendering "long ago were designated for this condemnation." The A. S. V. had translated correctly thus: "who were of old written of beforehand unto this condemnation." Moffatt, too, in his own version had rendered properly: "their doom has been predicted long ago."

A positive mistranslation according to our conviction is introduced in 1 Tim. 3:2, when the R. S. V. renders "Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once." The A. V. here has the correct translation "husband of one wife," which is likewise the rendering of the A. S. V. In this instance, too, Moffatt seems to have been the instigator, for in his own version he translates, speaking of the bishop, "he must be married only once." Of course, Goodspeed, too, translates "only once married." Here interpretation has taken the place of translation, and in our opinion there is no doubt that the sense of Scripture has been altered. The Apostle forbids polygamy in the case of bishops or elders, and it must not be overlooked that polygamy at that time was still widely practiced. If it should be replied that polygamy would be wrong not only for a bishop but for every parishioner, the rejoinder is that the other sins to which Paul points in this connection would be wrong for the parishioners, too, as well as for the bishops. Paul urges that the bishop should be an exemplar of his flock; hence, he mentions a number of virtues which should be found in him. The catalog is not exhaustive, but it indicates sufficiently how earnestly a minister must strive to practice the Christian conduct which he preaches.

Another source of regret is that questions of textual

criticism were not handled in a more conservative manner. Mark 16:9-20 is not printed as a part of the text, but in the lower margin. The omission of this passage, though advocated by some scholars who wish to be entirely loyal to the Scriptures, should not have been resolved on, because the evidence is not so clear and definite that every fair-minded person must declare the passage to be ungenue. The same stricture applies to the omission of Luke 22:19 b, 20 in the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. We are glad to see that in Luke 22:43, 44 the so-called "bloody sweat" passage, pertaining to the suffering of our Savior in Gethsemane, has not been eliminated, though Westcott and Hort printed it in brackets. Another passage of that kind which has been retained are the precious words of Jesus Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Hort had arrived at the conclusion that though these words had actually been spoken by Jesus, they were not included in the original copy of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We gladly admit that where it is evident that a certain section handed down in the received text is not genuine, we should not make people believe that we think it is genuine, but, on the other hand, we hold that it is a sound principle that in matters of this kind, where we are dealing with what is most sacred and precious, alterations should not be made unless it is really necessary.

In conclusion, we can say that the R. S. V. is a valuable production, for which we should be very grateful. Excellent scholarship is represented here, and on the whole it has traveled in the proper channels. The book is now before the Church and will be studied by the clergy and the laity. It is too early to say whether the Church should make an effort to have this version take the place of the A. V., which is deeply enshrined in the language and the affections of our people.

