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Our English Bible

By E. J. SALESKA

MANY Biblical scholars are agreed that September 30, 1952, will go down in American church history as a red-letter day. It was the publication date of the highly publicized Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Special services commemorating the event were held in more than three thousand communities. Coupled with this was the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the first printing, in Mainz, Germany, of the famous Gutenberg Bible. In recognition of this event the United States Government placed on sale on September 30 a special commemorative three-cent stamp.

The RSV is the first revision of the English Bible of any consequence to appear in the last half century and is the result of some fifteen years' work by a group of scholars representing the greater part of American Protestantism. These considerations alone make its publication another milestone in the history of the translated and printed Bible.

Some of the facts concerning the inception and publication of the RSV make interesting reading.

The International Council of Religious Education, which owns the copyright of the American Standard Version, believed that a new version was needed in order to eliminate antiquated language from the KJV and to give the English reader the benefit of recent archaeological, philological, and textual studies. A committee of Bible scholars was appointed, supplemented by a fifty-man advisory board, to survey and then undertake the work. Some of these had previously issued versions or translations of their own. As chairman, Luther A. Weigle, long-time dean of Yale Divinity School, was appointed in 1929. The work of revision did not get under way until 1937. Thirty-two men took some part in the work, but the actual revision and translation was in the hands of twenty-two men during the following fifteen-year period. Needless to say, all of the latest facilities for Biblical research were made available to this group. The Revised Standard New Testament made its appearance in 1946.

Probably no event in American church history has ever received such widespread publicity as the publication of the RSV, with radio, newspapers, periodicals, and television vying with one another in stressing its importance. It has been hailed as the biggest book project in American history. The one-million-copy first edition of September 30 was the largest ever taken by a publishing concern. It called for one thousand tons of paper, two thousand gallons of ink, over seventy-one miles of forty-inch cloth, and twenty million square inches of twenty-three-karat gold leaf. The first edition was sold out almost immediately.

In connection with a publication of such vast proportions, it is encouraging to note that, according to the *Christian Century*, the American Bible Society had its record year in 1951. Eric North, general secretary, reported that during the year the society distributed sixteen million volumes of Scripture, exceeding by 25 per cent the previous record set in 1945. Since its founding in 1816 the society has distributed a total of 415 million volumes of Scripture.

Here in St. Louis, at the annual meeting of the Gideons International recently, a budget of two and one-half million dollars was approved, aiming at the distribution of two million New Testaments to the Armed Forces, three million to children and young people, one hundred fifty thousand to nurses, seventy-five thousand to hospitals, in addition to two hundred fifty thousand to hotels and tourist camps.

In connection with the publication of the RSV, a recent survey has brought some interesting facts to light about Bible reading. Some 90 per cent of Protestant families own Bibles, and most of them possess more than one. They are usually kept in the living room, about half on the bookshelf, one fourth on a table. One third of the readers keep them at their bedside. It is estimated that 95 per cent read the Bible at some time, e. g., 40 per cent once a week, 20 per cent — chiefly Protestants — read it every day. Half of the readers "study it," 40 per cent read it as literature, and the rest both ways.

In view of all this publicity regarding the RSV and Bible distribution and use, a revived interest has been noted in the history of English Bible translation and versions. For this reason we append, for your convenience, a detailed tabular view of the genealogy of

the English Bible, basic sources used by revisers and translators, and pertinent notes which may be of interest.

The partly annotated bibliography, though far from complete, will nevertheless call attention to those sources available for further study of this interesting and vital subject.

Reference to a number of volumes of more recent vintage which make for a better understanding of the background of Biblical history and literature, may be helpful to those who may be inclined to further study in this direction. Dr. F. F. Bruce of the University of Sheffield, editor of the *Evangelical Quarterly*, has written a volume which appeared in 1950, published by Pickering & Inglis of London, entitled *The Books and the Parchments*. A recent work on text and versions has just been published by the University of Wales Press and authored by Bleddyn J. Roberts, titled *Old Testament Texts and Versions*. Those who have examined it state that it is really the first comprehensive book on this subject appearing in the English language and abreast of the latest discoveries and results of sound research. Quite comparable to the volume just mentioned is the one by Frederick G. Kenyon entitled *The Text of the Greek Bible*, first published in 1937 and now in a revised edition. This may be obtained through Blessings Book Store in Chicago. Another volume dealing with early manuscripts and versions, also by Kenyon, is entitled *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*. The fourth revised edition appeared in 1939.

OUR ENGLISH BIBLE GENEALOGY

MANUSCRIPT BIBLES AND PORTIONS

- 597—1382: Old English and Middle English; metrical paraphrases, glosses, and translations from the Latin Vulgate, etc. (Caedmon, Bede, Alfred, Aelfric.)
- 1382: The Wycliffe-Hereford Bible.
- 1388: A revision of Wycliffe by Purvey and others.

PRINTED BIBLES AND TESTAMENTS

- 1525: Tyndale's New Testament, from the original Greek, Luther, and Erasmus.
(3,000 copies — printed in Europe)
- 1530: Tyndale — portions of the Old Testament, Pentateuch, and Job — from the Hebrew.

- 1534: Tyndale's New Testament revised—also Old Testament portions.
- 1535: Tyndale's New Testament revised.
- 1535: Coverdale's Bible—from the Vulgate, Luther, Zuerich, Pagninus, Tyndale.
- 1536: Coverdale's Bible—second edition.
- 1537: Matthew's Bible (John Rogers), from Tyndale and Coverdale.
- 1539: Taverner's Bible—a private revision of Matthew's Bible plus the Vulgate and Greek text.
- 1539: Great Bible—first edition—from Matthew's, Muenster, Erasmus, Complutensian Polyglott (published in Paris and London).
- 1540: Great Bible—second edition—Preface by Cranmer.
- 1560: Genevan Bible, from original texts, Tyndale, Great Bible, and Beza. (First Bible with chapters and verses—Bible of the Pilgrim Fathers—140 editions.)
- 1568: Bishops' Bible, from Great Bible, Genevan, original texts.
- 1576: Tomson's—a revised Genevan Testament, from Genevan, Beza, Greek text.
- 1582: Rheims New Testament, from Vulgate and Genevan.
- 1609—1610: Douai Old Testament, from Vulgate and Genevan.
- 1611: Authorized Version, from original texts, Bishops' Bible, Genevan, Rhemish, Tremellius, Beza, and earlier Latin versions. (Forty-seven scholars—Church of England version—revisions made 1613, 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769.

18TH AND 19TH CENTURY TRANSLATIONS

- 1729: William Mace, "The New Testament in Greek and English." From original text, but broke sharply with traditional renderings.
- 1755: John Wesley, New Testament with Notes—a revision of the Authorized Version.
- 1764: Anthony Purver, "A New and Literal Translation" of the Bible (Quaker).
- 1768: Edward Harwood, "A Liberal Translation of the New Testament" (Paraphrase).
- 1791: Gilbert Wakefield, A Unitarian version.
- 1826: Alexander Campbell, "The New Testament," from the Greek original by three Doctors of the Church of Scotland.

- 1833: Rodolphus Dickinson, "A New and Corrected Version of the New Testament."
- 1833: Noah Webster, "The Common Version, with Amendments of Language."
- 1881: The English Revised New Testament—revised Authorized Version, from original text plus previous versions available. (Church of England translation, 27 scholars, Nonconformists represented, American committee co-operated. 10½ years in preparation.)
- 1885: The English Revised Old Testament, same as above (14 years in preparation).
- 1881—1883: American Revised New Testament—two unauthorized versions incorporating readings of the American Committee.
- 1898: American Revised New Testament—an unauthorized edition of the above, printed by Oxford and Cambridge University Presses.
- 1901: The American Standard Version, "translated out of the original tongues, being the version set forth A. D. 1611, compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A. D. 1881—1885." (Thomas Nelson copyright— for language and accuracy superior to others, and with greater consistency of translation when compared with the original text.)

INTERIM VERSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

- 1898—1901: The Twentieth-Century New Testament—based on the critical Greek text of Westcott and Hort of 1881. (Issued in three parts between 1898 and 1901 by twenty scholars representing various sections of the Christian Church. Modern paragraphing, quotation marks, titles, and subtitles included.)
- 1901: The Historical New Testament, by James Moffatt, based on the critical Greek text of Nestle, 1898, 1900. (Explanatory introduction, historical tables, critical notes, and an appendix on problems of interpolation, compilation, and authorship, with introductions to the various books. Arranged in supposed chronological order of books.)
- 1903: The New Testament in Modern Speech, by Richard F. Weymouth, edited and partly revised by E. Hampden-Cook. Based on the "Resultant Greek Testament"—a critical Greek text based on recent editions and published by Weymouth. (Brief introductions to books, modern paragraphing, quotation marks, section titles, and footnotes. First American edition, 1943.)

- 1903: **The Bible in Modern English**, by Farrar Fenton. (New edition 1938. Strange spelling of names—believed Gospel of John a translation from the Hebrew—not a worth-while translation.)
- 1907: **The Modern Reader's Bible**, by Richard G. Moulton. Based on the English Revised Version. (Includes part of the Apocrypha, introduction to books, general notes, and marginal readings. Attempts to illustrate by printed form the literary form and structure of the books, poetry, prose, drama, etc.)
- 1913: **The Holy Bible—An Improved Edition**. American Baptist Publication Society. Based in part on the Bible Union Version of 1864, 1865, and 1891. B. C. Taylor, W. R. Harper, J. R. Sampey, I. M. Price, and J. M. P. Smith worked the revision and translation. (Word "baptize" was followed by "immerse" in parentheses. Poetic sections printed as poetry, modern paragraphing, selected footnotes provided commentary.)
- 1923: **The Riverside New Testament**, by William G. Ballantine. Used Nestle's Greek text and acknowledges use of Weymouth, Moffatt, Twentieth-Century New Testament, Authorized Version, English Revised Version, and American Revised Version. (Verse numbers omitted, index of persons and subject. Revised edition, 1934.)
- 1924: **The Centenary New Testament**, by Mrs. Helen Barrett Montgomery, Baptist leader. (Uses translations of others, introductions to books, titles, and subtitles.)
- 1926: **The Bible, A New Translation**, by James Moffatt. Based on a critical Greek text by Herman von Soden, Berlin, 1902—1913. (Verses and paragraphs occasionally transposed and indicated by footnotes. Much is paraphrase or free interpretation. Many editions. Popular. A "Revised and Final Edition" was issued by Harpers in 1935.)
- 1931: **The Bible, An American Translation**, by J. M. P. Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed. Goodspeed based his New Testament translation of 1923 on the Westcott and Hort text and used simple, direct English in the American idiom. (Verse and chapter numbers are noted in margins.) The Old Testament edited by Smith in 1927 is the translation of T. J. Meek, Leroy Waterman, A. R. Gordon, and Smith. Its use of traditional versions is evident. (Paragraphing, quotations, poetic forms, etc., are employed, as are also subject titles.) Selections from this Bible were used for

the 1933 *The Short Bible—An American Translation*—with various books arranged in chronological order preceded by brief introductions. *The Complete Bible—An American Translation*—published 1939, consists of Meek's revision of the translation of the Old Testament, a new translation of the Apocrypha by Goodspeed, and his New Testament.

- 1945: *Berkeley Version of the New Testament*, by Gerrit Verkuyl. Based on the Greek text of Tischendorf primarily (brief comments as footnotes included).
- 1946: *The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*. A revision of the King James text (punctuation, quotations, paragraphing, etc.).
- 1950: *The Basic Bible*, edited by S. H. Hooke. Translated by a committee of English scholars. (Based on an English vocabulary of 850 words plus 50 Bible words and 100 additional words for Old Testament use.)
- 1952: *The Revised Standard Version*.

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