

LECTURE VI

THE AUTHORISED AND REVISED  
VERSIONS

' To whom was it ever imputed for a fault (by such as were wise) to go over that which he has done, and to amend it when he saw cause ? If we will be sons of the truth, we must consider what it speaketh, and trample upon our own credit, yea, and upon other men's too, if either be any way a hindrance to it.'

*(The Translators to the Reader, 1611.)*

## LECTURE VI

# THE AUTHORISED AND REVISED VERSIONS

‘ Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified ’ (2 Thess. iii. 1., R.V.).

### **Origin of the Authorised Version.**

WE HAVE traced the history of the early English versions of the New Testament and have noted the repeated attempts to get as faithful a rendering as possible of the original text by means of a series of revisions. Of these revisions three were in common use at the beginning of the seventeenth century: The Great Bible, The Genevan Bible, and The Bishops’ Bible, but we can understand the desire to have a new and authoritative version which would gradually supersede all its rivals and become the Bible of all English-speaking peoples. Nor was this desire long in being met, by the appearance of what came to be known afterwards as The Royal Version, or King James’s Version. It is strange how little is known regarding the origin of this great version, but it is generally traced to an incident at the

Conference at Hampton Court which the King held at the beginning of 1604 to hear and determine 'things pretended to be amiss in the Church.' In the course of the proceedings the Puritan leader, Dr. John Reynolds, threw out the suggestion 'that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those which were allowed in the reign of King Henry VIII and Edward VI were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original.' It is interesting to notice, however, that, so far at least as the King was concerned, the way had been prepared three years before by certain proceedings at a meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland at Burntisland, in 1601, at which he was present. On that occasion a similar proposal 'for a new translation of the Bible, and the correcting of the Psalms in meeter,' was thrown out, and the historian Spottiswood has told us that 'his Majesty did urge it earnestly, and with many reasons did perswade the undertaking of the work, showing the necessity and the profit of it. . . . Speaking of the necessity, he did mention sundry escapes [errors] in the common Translation, . . . and when he came to speak of the Psalmes, did recite whole verses of the same, shewing both the faults of the meeter and the discrepance from the text. It was the joy of all that were present to hear it,

and bred not little admiration in the whole Assembly.’<sup>1</sup> And though nothing further came of this at the time, the King did not lose sight of the suggestion, and we can understand the eagerness with which at Hampton Court he fell in with Reynolds’ suggestion and expressed the wish that ‘some special pains should be taken in that behalf for one uniform translation . . . professing that he could never yet see a Bible well translated in English ; but the worst of all his Majesty thought the Geneva to be.’

### Work of Translation.

Nor was this all, but James showed an active interest in the work by proposing that the new translation should be undertaken by ‘the best learned men in both universities, after them to be reviewed by the bishops and the chief learned of the Church ; from them to be presented to the Privy Council, and lastly to be ratified by his royal authority. Furthermore, the King ordered that the whole Church of the Kingdom should be bound by this new translation and none other.’

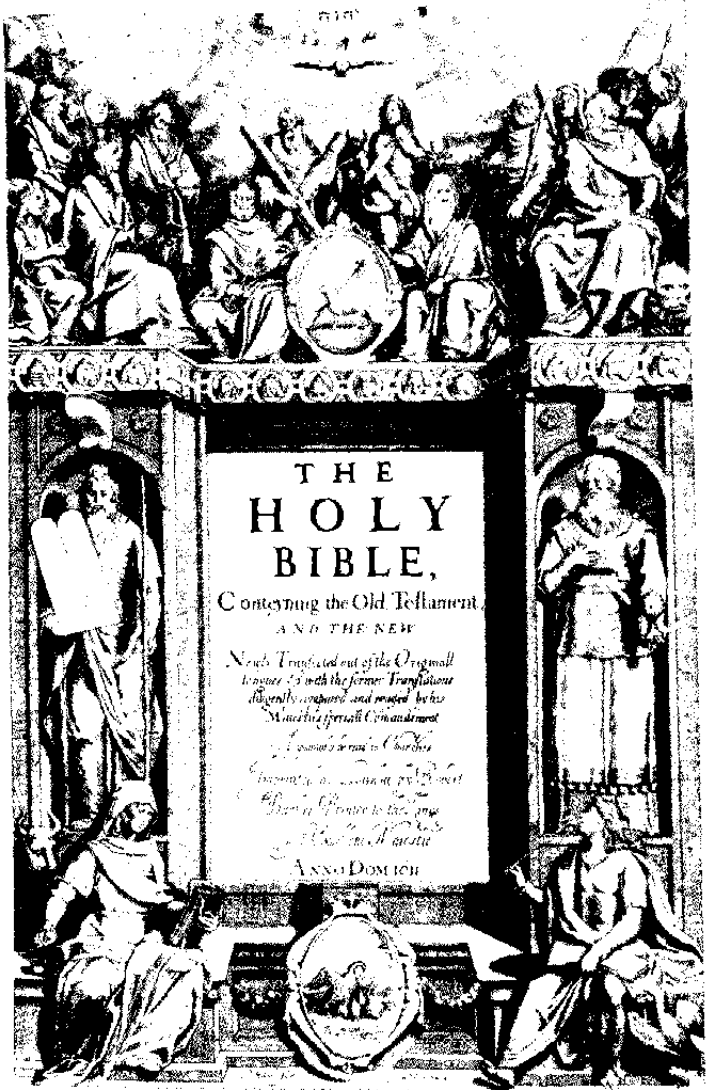
Notwithstanding the Royal favour bestowed

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh edition, 1850), iii. p. 98.

on it, the actual work of revision did not commence until 1607, when the forty-seven (the number originally was fifty-four) Translators appointed for the purpose were divided into six companies, of which two sat at Westminster, two at Oxford and two at Cambridge. These companies met both separately and from time to time together to hear and to compare translations, and the whole was then finally revised by a select company of six or twelve members.

Amongst the men appointed for the task were several justly famed for their scholarship, such as John Reynolds, whose 'memory and reading were near to a miracle'; Launcelot Andrewes, of whom it was said that he might have been 'interpreter-general at Babel'; Miles Smith, the author of the Preface, who 'had Hebrew at his finger-ends'; and Andrew Downs, described as 'one composed of Greek and industry.'

Fourteen rules were laid down for the Translators' guidance, of which the most important were to the effect that the Bishops' Bible should be taken as their basis, but with liberty to use other versions where they were preferable; that the old ecclesiastical words should be retained; that there be no marginal notes, except for necessary explanations of Hebrew and Greek words; and that there should be mutual consultation between the different companies.



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THE TITLE PAGE OF THE 1611 EDITION OF THE AUTHORIZED VERSION. In addition to the figures of the Apostles and Evangelists, note the Incommunicable Name at the head of the page, the Dove, the Triumphant Lamb, and the Pelican feeding her young. See p. 161.

According to a well-known anecdote contained in Selden's *Table Talk*, the general procedure was as follows: 'That Part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a Tongue, (as the *Apocrypha* to *Andrew Downs*); and then they met together, and one read the Translation, the rest holding in their Hands some Bible either of the learned Tongues, or *French, Spanish, Italian*, etc.; if they found any Fault, they spoke, if not he read on.'

According to the 'Translators' own account the whole work was carried through in two years and a quarter, and in 1611 the Bible appeared with the title:

The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament and the New: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues; and with the former Translations diligently compared and reuised by his Maiesties speciall Commandement. Appointed to be read in Churches.

*Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Maiestie. Anno Dom. 1611. Fol.*

### In What Sense Authorised ?

It will be noticed that the word 'Authorised,' by which the new version has come to be known, is no part of the title, and, as a matter of fact, there is no evidence that the version was ever

publicly sanctioned by Convocation or by Parliament or by the King. Only slowly, and by the force of superior merit, did King James's version attain its commanding position. It became the 'Authorised' version simply because it was the best.

Nor was it strictly speaking a new translation, and in their interesting Preface, no longer printed in our ordinary Bibles, the Translators specially guard against such an idea. 'Truly,' they write, 'good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavour, that our mark.' 'Neither did we disdain,' so they continue, 'to revise that which we have done, and to bring back to the anvil that we have hammered . . . fearing no reproach for slowness nor praise for expedition.'

### **Excellence of the Version.**

Of the success of their work it is not necessary to say anything, but we must not imagine that at the time the new version found a ready welcome. One eminent scholar went the length of saying that he 'had rather be rent in pieces by

wild horses than any such translation, by my consent, should be urged on poor churches.' If, however, the new version was slow in establishing itself, the hold which, once acquired, it has since maintained is unparalleled in the history of any other English translation.

None have been more ready to admit this than the men who in 1870 were appointed to revise it. 'We,' so the New Testament Revisers tell us in their Preface, 'have had to study this great Version carefully and minutely, line by line ; and the longer we have been engaged upon it the more we have learned to admire its simplicity, its dignity, its power, its happy terms of expression, its general accuracy, and, we must not fail to add the music of its cadences and the felicities of its rhythm.' And one of the most distinguished of their number, Bishop Westcott, who is also the historian of the English Bible, has written : ' Our version is the work of a Church and not of a man. Or rather, it is a growth, and not a work. Countless external influences, independent of the actual translators, contributed to mould it ; and when it was fashioned the Christian instinct of the nation, touched, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, decided on its authority.' He adds—and the words have an important bearing on our present subject : ' Our Bible in virtue of its

past is capable of admitting revision, if need be, without violating its history. As it gathered into itself, during the hundred years in which it was forming, the treasures of manifold labours, so it still has the same assimilative power of life.'

### Schemes for Further Revision.

From the first, indeed, revision in some form or other marked the history of our Authorised Version. Thus, in 1645, Dr. John Lightfoot, preaching before the House of Commons, urged them to think of a review and survey of the translations of the Bible, and pleaded for a new translation which should be 'exact, vigorous and lively.' And, a few years later, the Long Parliament actually made an order that a Bill should be brought in for a new translation which, however, came to nothing owing to the Parliament's dissolution.

Individual attempts at revision were also forthcoming, one or two of which may be referred to if only to show how readily in some cases they exhibit almost all the features a translation ought not to possess.

In 1764 a *New and Literal* translation of the whole Bible was made by a Quaker, Anthony Purver, prefaced by certain remarks on translations in general, in which he dwells on the

'obsolete, uncouth, clownish' expressions which disfigure the Authorised Version. And [this was followed in 1768 by Harwood's translation, written, it is claimed, 'with freedom, spirit, and elegance,' but containing such renderings as : 'The young lady is not dead' (Mark v. 39) ; 'A gentleman of splended family and opulent fortune had two sons' (Luke xv. 11) ; 'The clergyman said, you have given him the only right and proper answer' (Mark xii. 32).

A more ambitious scheme was outlined by a Roman Catholic scholar, Dr. Alexander Geddes, in his *Prospectus of a New Translation of the Holy Bible* (Glasgow, 1786), in which he points out that 'the first and principal cause of the imperfection of almost all modern Translations of the Bible is to be sought for in the imperfection and incorrectness of the originals, from which they were made ; for, when the text to be translated is itself corrupted, the translation must necessarily participate of its corruption ; but modern translations of the Bible have, almost all, been made from a text in many places corrupted : How then could they fail to be, at least, equally faulty ?' (p. 2). Unfortunately Geddes' own translation had not got further than 2 Chronicles, when it was stopped by the translator's death.

Other translations of the New Testament, in whole or in part, continued to appear, and along with Archbishop Trench's *Essay On the Authorised Version of the New Testament* (1858), Bishop Ellicott's *Considerations on the Revision of the English Version of the New Testament* (1870), Bishop Lightfoot's *Essay On a Fresh Revision of the English New Testament* (1871), and similar books, prepared the way for the *Revised New Testament* of 1881.

### Need of Revision.

The need of revision was obvious. Thus, it is now generally recognized that from 1611 to 1614 two sets of copies were already in circulation, differing in many minute particulars and characterized as the 'He' or the 'She' Bibles according as they rendered Ruth iii. 15. '... he went into the city' or '... she went into the city.' Apart, however, from such typographical variations,<sup>1</sup> many of the English words in the Authorised Version had become antiquated, or in the course of three centuries had so changed in meaning as no longer to be understood in the manner that was at first intended.

<sup>1</sup> Another edition was known as the 'Wicked Bible,' because it omitted the 'not' in the Seventh Commandment. The printers are said to have been fined £300 for the error.

A very commonly cited instance is the familiar precept, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink' (Matt. vi. 25), which at first sight seems to conflict strangely with the well-established rules of prudence and thrift. But in old English 'thought' had a note of anxiety attached to it which it has lost, and, therefore, to bring out the full force of the original we require now to render with the Revised Version, 'Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink,' and similarly in Phil. iv. 6, 'In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.' In like manner 'occupy' is no longer generally understood in its old sense of 'employ,' 'trade,' so that it is properly replaced by the latter term in the Parable of the Pounds, 'Trade ye herewith until I come' (Luke xix. 13). When, again, St. Peter speaks of unbelieving husbands being 'won by the conversation of the wives,' it is the wives' whole 'behaviour' and not the mere fact of what they say that he has in mind (1 Pet. iii. 1). Similarly, in 1 Thess. iv. 15, 'We which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep'—'prevent' is to be understood in its original sense of 'precede' (cf.

Matt. xvii. 25). Just as, to take an even more striking instance, in Rom. i. 13, 'I purposed to come unto you (but was let hitherto),' where 'let' means 'hinder,' the very opposite of 'permit' or 'allow,' as in the modern usage of the word (cf. 2 Thess. ii. 7).

But apart from such changes of meaning in the ordinary use of certain old English words and similar considerations, earlier and better texts of the original had become available, involving many important changes of reading. Thus, while the Translators of 1611 had access only to a few late Greek manuscripts of no special authority, at least two manuscripts of the highest importance, belonging to the fourth century, were now available—the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus. The knowledge of the versions of the Early Church had also greatly increased, and vastly better aids in the matter of lexicons and grammars had placed scholars in a much more favourable position than any of their predecessors for removing the inaccuracies that had crept into previous translations.

### **Origin of the Revised Version.**

The result was that in May, 1870, the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury decided

to 'nominate a body of its own members to undertake the work of revision, who shall be at liberty to invite the co-operation of any eminent for scholarship, to whatever nation or religious body they may belong.'

### **The Work of Revision.**

In terms of this resolution, two Companies were formed for the revision of the Old and of the New Testaments respectively. The New Testament Company consisted at first of twenty-seven, but for the greater part of the time of twenty-four, members and was presided over by Dr. Ellicott, Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol. The Scottish Representatives were: Bishop Wordsworth, St. Andrews; Principal Brown, F.C. College, Aberdeen; Professor Eadie, U.P. College, Glasgow; Professor Miligan, The University, Aberdeen; and Professor Roberts, The University, St. Andrews. From an early date steps were also taken to secure the valuable aid of American scholars, to whose 'care, vigilance, and accuracy' the Revisers bear ample testimony in the Preface.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>After the time of co-operation with the English Revisers had come to an end, certain survivors of the American Committee in 1901 combined to issue what has come to be known as the Standard American Edition of the Revised Version.

Eight Principles and Rules were laid down for the Revisers' guidance, of which the first five, in view of their importance, may be cited in full :

1. To introduce as few alterations as possible into the Text of the Authorised Version consistently with faithfulness.

2. To limit, as far as possible, the expression of such alterations to the language of the Authorised and earlier English Versions.

3. Each Company to go twice over the portion to be revised, once provisionally, the second time finally, and on principles of voting as hereinafter is provided.

4. That the Text to be adopted be that for which the evidence is decidedly preponderating ; and that when the Text so adopted differs from that from which the Authorised Version was made, the alteration be indicated in the margin.

5. To make or retain no change in the Text on the second final revision by each Company, except *two-thirds* of those present approve of the same, but on the first revision to decide by simple majorities.

The place of meeting of the New Testament Company was the Jerusalem Chamber attached to the Deanery of Westminster Abbey, and already famous as the scene of the preparation of the Westminster Confession of Faith and of the Longer and Shorter Catechisms. The procedure followed was much the same as in

the case of the Authorised Version, and was continued over a period of ten and a half years, until at length in 1881 the Revised New Testament was published with the simple title :

The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, translated out of the Greek : being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1881.

### **The Value of the Revised Version.**

The appearance of the new version aroused the deepest interest both in this country and in the United States, but this is not to say that it was not subjected to much severe criticism, as had been the case with its predecessor. The Revisers' English in particular was strongly attacked, and it was felt that they had sacrificed too much of the old and familiar cadences. This may be the case, and I am not here to defend the Revised Version throughout, but what I do claim is that it gives a more exact and faithful reproduction of the words of the original documents and forms an indispensable companion to the exact study of the New Testament. Take a Parallel New Testament, compare the readings verse by verse and word by word, and you will be amazed at the important

changes thus brought to light, necessitated by better authenticated readings and a more accurate understanding of the original Greek.

An obvious example of the latter sort is Acts xxvi. 28, where for the familiar 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian' we now read 'With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian.' So far from admitting himself to be almost converted, Agrippa rather insinuates that Paul is surely expecting too much from the short conversation that had passed.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, to turn to another example, when Herodias' daughter danced before Herod and he promised her whatsoever she would ask, 'she,' so we read in our ordinary version, 'being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger' (Matt. xiv. 8). But the Revised Version, correctly interpreting the Greek verb, has 'she, being put forward by her mother, saith . . .,' clearly indicating that the girl herself was unwilling to make such a proposal, and had to be urged on by her revengeful mother, until at length, as we learn from Mark vi. 25, 'she came in straight-way with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou forthwith give me in a charger

<sup>1</sup> A similar rendering is found in Purvey's edition of Wyclif: 'And Agrippa saide to Poul, In litil thing thou counsellist me to be maad a Cristen man.'

the head of John the Baptist,' as if it were an errand she would gladly have over as quickly as possible.

Another obvious gain of the Revised Version is the general consistency with which the same Greek word is represented by the same English equivalent. This we know was not the case in the Authorised Version, where the Translators rather prided themselves on the variety of their renderings, and thereby failed to put the modern reader as nearly as possible in the same position as the reader of the original. An example is St. Mark's use of the Greek adverb (*εὐθύς*) for 'straightway,' which occurs no fewer than forty times in his Gospel. Why should this be obscured by the word receiving five different renderings, 'straightway,' 'immediately,' 'forthwith,' 'anon,' and 'as soon as'; while the equally characteristic 'abide' of St. John's Gospel is rendered indiscriminately 'abide,' 'remain,' 'dwell,' 'continue,' 'tarry,' and 'endure.'

### **The Doctrinal Significance of the Revised Version.**

There remains still the doctrinal significance of the Revised Version which cannot be ignored. For while it is true that it leaves the sum of

Christian doctrine untouched, that is not to say that no new light is thrown upon many truths by the more exact renderings of the later version.

The point is treated with considerable fulness in the present writer's small book on *The Expository Value of the Revised Version*, but a single illustration of what is meant may be cited from it.

Take the great christological passage, Phil. ii. 5-8, and note how 'starting with the thought of Christ's Divinity, the Apostle proceeds to tell us how He Who was thus originally in the form of God counted not this equality of being with God "a prize," a thing to be grasped at or retained, as compared with what by sacrifice He might effect for our sakes, but "emptied Himself," this great act involving, rather than followed by (as the Authorised Version suggests), the two great steps, "taking the form of a servant (bond-servant)," and "being made (becoming) in the likeness of men," while these in turn led to the lowest step of all, "the death of the Cross." How clearly as we note the changes, and more particularly that one bold expression "emptied Himself," so different from the paraphrastic "made Himself of no reputation," is the tremendous reality of our Lord's humiliation brought home to us. And in the verses that follow what new dignity is

added to the exaltation by "the (not "a") name which is above every name," which God gives to Jesus, "in (not "at") which every knee should bow." ' 1

Nothing would be easier than to go on multiplying examples, but I trust that enough has been said to prove that the Revised Version furnishes an aid which no one who desires to get at the exact meaning of the original Scripture can afford to ignore. The more it is studied the more will its so-called blemishes disappear and every page be found to throw new and striking light on the inexhaustible depth of meaning hidden in the Sacred Word.<sup>2</sup>

### Fresh Efforts at Revision.

Half a century has passed since the Revised Version was published, and no attempt on the same scale has been made to supersede it. But, again, there have been a number of what we

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that the Authorised rendering 'at the name of Jesus,' should first be found in the Genevan Testament of 1557, and that consequently this version should have been the means of establishing one of those outward ceremonies against which the Genevan Reformers set themselves so strongly.

<sup>2</sup> No better guide for this purpose could be found than Bishop Westcott's *Some Lessons of the Revised Version of the New Testament* (London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1897).

may call private attempts in which individual scholars have supplied us with translations, embodying what seemed to them the most important results of recent criticism of the Greek text, and making use of what may be called everyday English, as compared with the more antiquated language of the great Versions.<sup>1</sup>

An early example is offered by the *Twentieth Century New Testament* (1898), the story of whose production is one of the romances of translation. The version sprang, we are told, from the chance remark of a yeoman farmer to a lady visitor at Keswick. 'Why,' he asked, 'is not the Bible written so that we can understand it?' And on being told that it was three hundred years since the Authorised Version was published, and that consequently it contained many old words, he not unnaturally put the further question, 'Then why does not some one translate it into English again?' The idea took root. The lady made a beginning with a rendering into simple modern English of the first two chapters of St. Mark's Gospel. This came into the hands of a busy engineer. A

<sup>1</sup> Selden in his *Table-Talk* speaks of the *English Translation of the Bible* as 'the best Translation in the World,' but adds in a footnote that 'there is no book so translated, *i.e.* so peculiarly translated, considering the purpose it was meant for—General reading.'

partnership was formed : other workers were enlisted : and arrangements were made for the discussion of such crucial words as Baptism, Church, Gehenna, and so forth. From the beginning the names of the Revisers were withheld from the public, but they included representatives of different Churches and Universities. No reward was sought save the perfection of the work itself. And it was as ' a labour of love ' that the Translators commended it ' to the good-will of all English-speaking people, and to the blessing of Almighty God.'

About the same time Dr. Weymouth issued his *New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903), in which, following the readings of his *Resultant Greek Testament*, he aimed at furnishing ' a succinct and compressed running commentary (not doctrinal) to be used side by side with its elder compeers.' The version found wide acceptance and passed through various editions, the last in 1929 being enriched with numerous additional illustrative notes at the hands of Professor J. A. Robertson of Aberdeen.

Dr. Moffatt's *The New Testament : A New Translation* (1913 and many later dates) is too well known to require any introduction or description. Its general usefulness has been

cordially recognized, nor can there be any question as to the light which it throws upon some of the more difficult passages in the Pauline Epistles. Any criticism that suggests itself is rather in the direction of an occasional use of over-colloquial words and phrases and a tendency to paraphrase rather than to translate.

Along with Dr. Moffatt's may be mentioned a new American translation, which we owe to Professor E. J. Goodspeed of Chicago. Professor Goodspeed is a distinguished papyrologist, and knows how to make the best use of the most recent light thrown upon our New Testament vocabulary. And it is an interesting sign of the times that his translation should have awakened such interest in America, as to have been reprinted in various magazines and newspapers. It is certainly well worth study, and fulfils the translator's aim of bringing home 'the great, living messages of the New Testament a little more widely and forcibly to the life of our time.'

### **Is Further Revision Necessary ?**

But the question remains. Has the time come for a thorough-going revision of our existing translations, a revision in which the best

scholarship of the day will be represented, and which will command the confidence of the Church at large? The question has been raised in various quarters, and interesting experiments have been made of the kind of translation desired. But, on the whole, the general opinion of scholars appears to be that the time for a further authoritative revision is not yet. Many textual problems still await solution before we can hope to have the New Testament autographs in their original form. The vocabulary and grammar of the Greek New Testament are at present the subject of extensive investigation, resulting often in new and fresh meanings being attached to familiar words and phrases. And it must be kept in view that the difficulties of translation, always great, are specially so in the case of our New Testament, where we are met with the demand for a version which, while retaining the dignity and simplicity of the Authorised Version, is at the same time more faithful to the original Greek than it was always possible for that Version to be.

Here, then, we must leave our enquiry. In the present limits it has only been possible to touch upon many of the points raised, but enough, I trust, has been said to bring home the real and living character of our New Testament writings. And, though the exact wording

of particular sayings or incidents may still be uncertain, we have the assurance that the main teaching of our Lord rests upon a firm and certain basis.

Meanwhile, the story we have been following is its own best lesson, but if we are to point the moral, it cannot be done better than in the words of the noble Preface to the Authorised Version :

But now, what piety without truth ; what truth, what saving truth, without the word of God. What word of God, whereof we may be sure, without the Scripture. The Scripture we are commanded to search. . . . If we be ignorant they will instruct us ; if out of the way, they will bring us home ; if out of order, they will reform us ; if in heaviness, comfort us ; if dull, quicken us ; if cold, inflame us. *Tolle, lege ; tolle, lege ;* take up and read, take up and read.