

## THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE—TRANSLATING A CLASSIC

By F. R. ARNOTT\*

IT is my pleasant task first to thank you, Mr. President, and your fellow members of the Arts Association, for the honour you have done me in your invitation to address you tonight ; and in the second place, on behalf of us all to offer congratulations to those who are graduating in the Faculty of Arts in this year of grace 1961. We wish you well under whichever Muse you may take your way, and we hope you will join this society and thus preserve your interest in humane studies as well as retain your University friendships through its activities.

In our secular tradition, it may seem an impertinence that I should stand before you with such a topic to expound. But if like Lord Chesterfield you consider that " Religion is by no means a proper subject in a mixed company ",<sup>1</sup> I hope you will also agree with the same cynical statesman that " Parsons are very like other men, and neither the better nor the worse for wearing a black gown ".<sup>2</sup> The subject of the New English Bible was suggested to me as my theme, and I gladly accept it. The language of the Authorised Version has been largely responsible for making the speech of Shakespeare or Milton a living voice in our common-place, jazz-crazed age, and its phrases are echoed again and again in the pages of our poets, orators and novelists ; and even occasionally today some statesman may emphasise a debating point by such a phrase as " We are unprofitable servants " ; " they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind " ; " Stay with me flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love " ; " If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the Battle ? "

There are many Classics, but few translations of them which excel or even compare with the worth of the original. When Anatole France was told by one of his friends that translation was an impossible thing, he replied : " Precisely, my friend ; the recognition of this truth is a necessary preliminary to success in the art."

Whether we are considering a poem or a sermon or a story, each consists of a succession of experiences, sounds, images, thoughts, emotions, all closely related together through which we must pass, whether we are readers or listeners exerting our imaginations in an act of re-creation. Meaning and form go closely together, and true meaning can be conveyed properly only in its own words. Words, if

\* An address delivered on 9th May, 1961, by F. R. Arnett, M.A. (Oxon.), Th.D., then Warden of St. Paul's College within the University of Sydney, since appointed to be a Coadjutor Bishop of Melbourne, to a Meeting of the Association in the Great Hall of the University.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Chesterfield's Letters—Letter to his godson, Number 112. Ed. Earl of Carnarvon, Oxford, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to his son, 5th April, 1746, 3rd. Edit., MDCCLXXIV.

changed, even into another language, must lose something of their meaning. Consequently, a translation of poetry is never merely the old meaning in a new dress, but a new creation, though approximating more closely to the original in meaning than in form.

We all know that "Words strain

Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still."<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty is great enough when some work of scholarship, a popular novel or a magazine article has to be translated into another language; it becomes a definite challenge when one has to render a classic, such as Homer or Dante or the Bible. Should we choose prose or verse? If the latter, should it follow the form of the original? The insipid asininity of "Evangeline" should discourage any attempt to reproduce Vergilian hexameters in English, though the Authorised Version succeeded unwittingly with one lovely hexameter line: "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them."<sup>4</sup> Nor does Tennyson's "O you crowds of indolent reviewers" represent the felicity of the Catullan lyric. When we think in terms of prose, we are repelled by the schoolboy cribs, with their word for word vacuity, and their remarkable ability to combine the minimum accuracy with the elimination of every particle of eloquence from a passage of Cicero or Demosthenes. Perhaps poetry has never been more successfully rendered into another language than by the compilers of the Authorised Version of the Bible, in such passages as the Twenty-third Psalm, the close of Ecclesiastes, "Remember also Thy Creator in the days of thy youth", or the XIVth chapter of St. John, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God; believe also in me".

Often words and phrases in one language cannot literally be translated into another; ὕβρις in Greek tragedy means more than the English pride; πόλις more than a city; how do you render "the owl-eyed goddess Athene"? or "dawn with her rosy fingers"? How effectively would a Russian or a Mexican render

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears",

or the Speech in "Macbeth" which begins with the unscannable

"To-morrow, and to-morrow and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time."

If we are to appraise appreciatively the work of the Biblical translators, whether of the Cxvi or Cxx, we may be wise to approach our subject through another classic, "Homer", remembering incidentally that it was the publication of Wolf's Prolegomena

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets". "Burnt Norton", 5 (MCMLIX).

<sup>4</sup> Colossians, iii. 19.

to Homer in 1876 that opened the way to the modern source criticism of the Pentateuch or the synoptic Gospels, and that Matthew Arnold in a well-known essay "On Translating Homer", wrote: The Translator "will find one English book and one only where, as in the Iliad itself, perfect plainness of speech is allied with perfect nobleness, and that book is the Bible"<sup>5</sup>. Earlier in the same essay, Arnold had laid down his view of the principles on which a translator of a classic should proceed<sup>6</sup>:

"The translator of Homer should, above all, be penetrated by a sense of four qualities of his author:—that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is, both in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, that is, in his matter and ideas; and finally, that he is eminently noble."

How have the English translations of Homer measured up to such an ideal? Let us take a few brief passages from the Odyssey.

Chapman introduced the Elizabethan courtiers and pirates to the surge and thunder of the Odyssey, clothing the epic in renaissance dress, full of elaborate flourishes, and daring conceits; when the winds toss Odysseus about, their play is called "the horrid tennis", and Calypso's island is bathed in as serene and decent a light as Prospero's magic isle, "full of noises, sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not".

"But when the far-off Ile he toucht, he went  
Up from the blue sea, to the Continent,  
And reacht the ample Caverne of the Queene;  
Whom he within found, without, seldome seene.  
A Sun-like fire upon the harth did flame;  
The matter precious, and divine the frame,  
Of Cedar cleft, and Incense was the Pile,  
That breath'd an odour round about the Ile.  
Her selfe was seated in an inner roome,  
Whom sweetly sing he heard; and at her loome,  
About a curious web, whose yarne she drew  
In, with a golden shittle.<sup>7</sup> A Grove grew  
In endless spring about her Caverne round,  
With odorous Cypress, Pines, and Poplars crown'd.  
Where Haulks, Sea-owles, and long-tongu'd Bittours bred,  
And other birds their shadie pinions spred.  
All Fowles maritimall; none roosted there,  
But those whose labours in the waters were."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Arnold, "On Translating Homer", Chapter iii. (1925 edition.)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter I (page 250).

<sup>7</sup> "Shittle"—old form of "shuttle".

<sup>8</sup> George Chapman, *Odyssey*, Book V, 55-67, 1897, 2nd edit. (1874 first published).

Late in the Nineteenth Century, Butcher and Lang produced what was to become almost "a classic" English prose translation; it appealed to Victorian romanticism, because its authors believed "the Greek epic dialect, like the English of our Bible, was a thing of slow growth and composite nature, that it was never a spoken language, nor, except for certain poetical purposes, a written language. Thus the Biblical English seems as nearly analogous to the Epic Greek, as anything that our tongue has to offer."<sup>9</sup> Their translations thus reflected especially the language of Coverdale's Psalter, the bristling epithets of the Norse legends which William Morris had made popular, and that antiquated and sentimental atmosphere, which went well with the antimacassar and aspidistra.

"In the evening he came shepherding his flocks of goodly fleece, and presently he drave his fat flocks into the cave each and all, nor left he any without in the deep court-yard, whether through some foreboding, or perchance that the the god so bade him do. Thereafter he lifted the huge door-stone and set it in the mouth of the cave, and sitting down he milked the ewes and bleating goats, all orderly, and beneath each ewe he placed her young. Now when he had done all his work busily, again he seized yet other two and made ready his supper. Then I stood by the Cyclops and spake to him, holding in my hands an ivy bowl of the dark wine :

'Cyclops, take and drink wine after thy feast of man's meat, that thou mayest know what manner of drink this was that our ship held. And lo, I was bringing it thee as a drink offering, if haply thou mayest take pity and send me on my way home, but thy mad rage is past all sufferance. O hard of heart, how may another of the many men there be come ever to thee again, seeing that thy deeds have been lawless?'

So I spake, and he took the cup and drank it off, and found great delight in drinking the sweet draught, and asked me for it yet a second time :

'Give it me again of thy grace, and tell me thy name straightway, that I may give thee a stranger's gift, wherein thou mayest be glad. Yea for the earth, the grain-giver, bears for the Cyclôpes the mighty clusters of the juice of the grape, and the rain of Zeus gives them increase, but this is a rill of very nectar and ambrosia.'

So he spake, and again I handed him the dark wine. Thrice I bare and gave it to him, and thrice in his folly he drank it to the lees. Now when the wine had got about the wits of the Cyclops, then did I speak to him with soft words :

'Cyclops, thou askest me my renowned name, and I will declare it unto thee, and do thou grant me a stranger's gift, as thou didst promise. Noman is my name, and Noman they call me, my father and my mother and all my fellows.'

<sup>9</sup> Butcher and Lang, "Preface to the Odyssey", p. ix (first published 1879).

So I spake, and straightway he answered me out of his pitiless heart :

‘ Noman will I eat last in the number of his fellows, and the others before him : that shall be thy gift.’ ”<sup>10</sup>

T. E. Lawrence saw the *Odyssey* with starry eyes as a distant mirage of splendour which had to be reduced to matter-of-fact prose, drained of poetic feeling, yet still not the prose of everyday speech :

“ She went near to this father she loved, that she might softly say :

‘ Dear Father, will you not let me have the deep easy-wheeled waggon, that I may take all the good soiled clothes that lie by me to the river for washing ? It is only right that you, whenever you go to sit in council with the leaders, should have clean linen to wear next to your skin : while of your five sons begotten in the house only two have taken wives : and the three merry bachelors are always wanting clothes newly washed when they go out to dances. Thinking about all these things is one of my mind’s cares.’

So much she said, too shy to name to her dear father the near prospect of her marriage : but he saw everything and answered in a word :

‘ My child, I do not grudge you mules, or anything. Go : the bondsmen will get you the tall, light waggon with the high tilt.’ ”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, let us hear some of E. V. Rieu’s idiomatic modern prose, which made the *Odyssey* into a best seller in the way of escapist literature for the post-war era of 1945, as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* has been for 1961. People read Homer and were absorbed by the narrative on buses or tube trains. Homer had become the possession of the masses again. For a change we will take a passage from “ *The Iliad* ”, when Hector, the princely champion of Troy, says farewell to his wife, Andromache :

“ As he finished, glorious Hector held out his arms to take his boy. But the child shrank back with a cry to the bosom of his girdled nurse, alarmed by his father’s appearance. He was frightened by the bronze of the helmet and the horsehair plume that he saw nodding grimly down at him. His father and lady mother had to laugh. But noble Hector quickly took his helmet off and put the dazzling thing on the ground. Then he kissed his son, dandled him in his arms, and prayed to Zeus and the other gods : ‘ Zeus, and you other gods, grant that this boy of mine may be, like me, pre-eminent in Troy ; as strong and brave as I ; a mighty king of Ilium. May people say, when he comes back from battle, “ Here is a better man than his father ”. Let him bring home the bloodstained armour of the enemy he has killed, and make his mother happy.’

Hector handed the boy to his wife, who took him to her fragrant breast. She was smiling through her tears, and when her husband saw this he was moved.

<sup>10</sup> Butcher and Lang, *Odyssey*, Book IX, 336–370.

<sup>11</sup> T. E. Shaw, *Odyssey*, Book VI, 56–70.

He stroked her with his hand and said : ' My dear, I beg you not to be too much distressed. No one is going to send me down to Hades before my proper time. But Fate is a thing that no man born of woman, coward or hero, can escape. Go home now, and attend to your own work, the loom and the spindle, and see that the maidservants get on with theirs. War is men's business ; and this war is the business of every man in Ilium, myself above all.' <sup>12</sup>

Perhaps, we can now appreciate more clearly the problems facing those responsible for a new translation of The Bible, after this pleasant digression on the translators of Homer. Books, like other objects that have been venerated and cherished by masses of the people for many centuries, are not lightly discarded or allowed to pass into neglect ; they take upon themselves something of the nature of the sacrosanct. We can imagine the protests that would arise if a government proposed to alter the design of the Union Jack, pull down Westminster Abbey, set "Waltzing Matilda" to a new tune. Shakespeare or Milton changed into the jargon of the comic strip would cease to have any appeal for us. Similarly, many argue that to produce a new version of the New Testament in contemporary English is an act of sacrilege ; taking away "all the poetry of the Bible", it is alleged. But there is an important difference between Shakespeare and the Authorised Version of the Bible, though both belong to the same age. Shakespeare with all his infinite variety and genius remains a great piece of literature ; put into modern English, the poetry must disappear to a large extent ; when he is translated into French or German, his plays become virtually a new piece of work altogether. But the Authorised Version is itself a translation from older Hebrew and Greek authors, and there is no reason that compels us to read it in this particular version. Incidentally, the King James Version was never officially authorised either by Parliament or Convocation to be read in churches, except in so far as the passages selected for the Epistles and Gospels in the Prayer Book of 1662 must be read from it, but the ordinary lessons of Morning and Evening Prayer are commanded to be read in English, without the specifying of any special version.

From the Christian point of view, the Bible is a Word of God to every man and every age, and as such must be made relevant and alive for each generation. It has been said that in the Seventeenth Century the English people were "intoxicated with the poetry of the Bible and with the hope for a new Heaven on earth". The Authorised Version is incomparable as a literary masterpiece, certainly the finest achievement of any committee, and its influence on English diction and subsequent literature has been immense. The new translation is not intended to supersede it, but since 1611 there have been important changes in both Biblical scholarship and the use of the English tongue. Many today find the long and involved sentences, the archaic expressions, the division into verses, obstacles to understanding the real meaning of the Bible, so that it has become—to use an exaggerated witticism—

<sup>12</sup> E. V. Rieu, "The Iliad"—Penguin Classics, 129-130. Iliad, Book Vi, 466-493. First edition 1950. (The Odyssey, 1945.)

“the most unread best-seller in the world”. We may agree with Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch<sup>13</sup>:

“That a large committee of forty-seven should have gone steadily through the great mass of Holy Writ, seldom interfering with genius, yet, when interfering, seldom missing to improve: that a committee of forty-seven should have captured . . . a rhythm so personal, so constant, that our Bible has the voice of one author speaking through its many mouths, that is a wonder before which I can only stand humble and aghast.”

But the long and splendid cadences and the rich diction of the Seventeenth Century are as difficult and remote to most of our contemporaries as if they had been written in Latin. Also, the scholars appointed by the Hampton Court Conference worked for the most part with late and unreliable Greek manuscripts, and there have been great advances since that date in the science of textual criticism, although the accuracy of the King James Version is as great, if not greater, than that of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, the other two famous classical translations of Scripture. The panel of scholars responsible for the version published last March have not only studied the hundreds of manuscripts and fragments discovered by modern research and archaeology but also made use of evidence gleaned from Egyptian papyri, from the Dead Sea Scrolls, from ancient translations into Syriac, Coptic or Latin, and from quotations in the early Fathers of the Church.

This new version was born out of a practical need. The Chaplains in World War II reported a widespread ignorance of the Bible amongst the men and women to whom they ministered. Most of their difficulties arose from an inability to see the true meaning of the text beneath the unreal phraseology. The Church of Scotland was thus prompted to set up a Commission to consider the Revision of the Bible, and in 1947 a joint committee was established representing not only the Church of Scotland which had initiated the question, but also the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Congregational Union, the Presbyterian Church in England, the Baptist Union, the Society of Friends, representatives of the Churches in Ireland and Wales, and the British and Foreign Bible Society. Three separate Commissions were set up to concern themselves with the New Testament, the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, but so far only that on the New Testament has completed its work. The Chairman of the Committee was Dr. A. T. P. Williams, Bishop of Durham, and a former Headmaster of Winchester, and the Secretary was Professor J. K. S. Reid of the Church of Scotland. The Chairman of the New Testament Translating Panel was Dr. C. H. Dodd, a Congregationalist, a Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and long famous in Europe and America as a fine classical and theological scholar. Fifty-seven meetings of the panel, most of them lasting for a period of three days, have been held.

When an earlier attempt was made to revise the Authorised Version in the eighteen eighties, the translators were instructed to “introduce as few alterations

<sup>13</sup> Quiller Couch, “The Art of Writing”, p. 122 (1916 edit.).

as possible into the text of the Authorised Version, consistently with faithfulness". Consequently, the work, usually known as "The Revised Version", was and remains valuable to scholars, but did little to commend the work to the ordinary listener and reader, especially since the panel contained few men of letters with an ear for the music of English prose. The Old Testament version is much better than the New, which was marred by excessive conservatism and scholarship which, at times, verged on pedantry.

We have had a number of modern translations since 1880, most of them individual translations, without the authority or backing of the official churches. Their literary and scholarly quality varies considerably, and some of them reflect overmuch the fancies of the fleeting moment. Moffat, Goodspeed, Phillips, Wand, Rieu and Knox represent some of the better examples. As a literary work, Father Knox's version is outstanding, but its value is lessened because, of necessity, it is a translation from the Vulgate, the official Roman Catholic version of the Bible, and not from the Hebrew and Greek originals. The version of Rieu, like his translation of Homer, is vigorous and exciting, but occasionally freakish in its choice of contemporary jargon, and not entirely suitable for reading aloud in public worship. The following well represents his style:

"That very day, in their synagogue, there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit, who cried out: 'What is your business with us, Jesus the Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are, the Holy One of God.'

Jesus rounded on him. 'Hold your tongue', he said, 'and come out of the man.'

The unclean spirit convulsed the man, gave a loud cry and came out of him. All were amazed. 'What have we here?' they said as they talked the matter over. 'A new doctrine, this! And it has power behind it. He even tells unclean spirits what to do and they obey him.'

From that moment his fame spread everywhere, through all the countryside of Galilee."<sup>14</sup>

In 1952 appeared the American Revised Standard Version, sponsored by all the major Protestant denominations of Canada and the U.S.A. This is less conservative than the English Revised Version, has eliminated archaic phrases, and the use of the Second Person singular except in prayers, but yet successfully retains many of the familiar and sonorous rhythms of the older versions. Hence I have found it particularly admirable for reading aloud. In the Preface, the compilers of the A.R.S.V. write:

"The Revised Standard Version is not a new translation in the language of today. It is not a paraphrase which aims at striking idioms. It is a revision which seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used throughout the years. It is intended for use in public and private

<sup>14</sup>The Four Gospels, translated by E. V. Rieu, 1952. (Mark, i. 23-28.)

worship, not merely for reading and instruction. We have resisted the temptation to use phrases that are merely current usage, and have sought to put the message of the Bible in simple enduring words that are worthy to stand in the great Tyndale-King James tradition. We are glad to say with the King James' translators: 'Truly (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.'<sup>15</sup>

The New English Bible which appeared last March has the same ideal, "to make a good one better". The volume is a triumph for the British publishers, being clearly and beautifully printed, strongly bound, especially in the Library edition, and very reasonably priced. It has already become a "best-seller". It is not a revision of the Authorised Version, or any other older version. In their preface, the compilers state they were enjoined to replace Greek constructions and idioms by those of contemporary English.

"Fidelity in translation was not to mean keeping the general framework of the original intact while replacing Greek words by English words more or less equivalent. A word, indeed, in one language is seldom the exact equivalent of a word in a different language. Each word is the centre of a whole cluster of meanings and associations, and in different languages these clusters overlap but do not often coincide . . . The translator can hardly hope to convey in another language every shade of meaning that attaches to the word in the original, but if he is free to exploit a wide range of English words covering a similar area of meaning and association he may hope to carry over the meaning of the sentence as a whole."<sup>16</sup>

The compilers hence wisely avoided the pedantic example of earlier revisers who insisted on the uniform translation of one Greek word by the same equivalent English term, and used a variety of words, following the classical example of their predecessors appointed by King James. Perhaps, sometimes their desire to make the rougher places of St. Paul more smooth has led them to theological paraphrase rather than strict translation, but in a work for the general reader rather than the scholar, this can prove an advantage.

The Version has avoided the clichés of modern usage, and whilst taking pains to make the meaning clear, it yet does not become a mere paraphrase. Long and involved sentences are broken down into short ones; Latinisms have been expunged; quotations from the Old Testament have been plainly indicated; the whole narrative is printed in paragraphs, and headings have been added to aid the reader to follow the argument.

To judge a translation fairly, the reader must take a book as a whole, and not content himself with considering verses at random. The translators of the Gospel

<sup>15</sup> American Revised Standard Version, 1952. Preface, p. xi. N.T. 1946, O.T. 1952. First complete edition 1952.

<sup>16</sup> New English Bible, Library Edition, 1961. Preface, p. ix.

according to St. Mark, or of the Acts of the Apostles, have created a story that grips the attention with its sense of immediacy and reality ; the omission of connective particles proves an aid here ; there is a remarkable freshness, and it meets Erasmus's demand,<sup>17</sup> that we are able to see Jesus Christ " talking, healing, dying and rising again, the whole story so vivid that a reader might appear to see less if he had actually seen the events with his own eyes ".

This version may well help the Twentieth Century to appreciate the true value of the Bible, as Erasmus and the Sixteenth Century versions stirred the minds of Europe at the Renaissance.

It is the Pauline Epistles which, perhaps, seem most difficult to the modern reader, and a comparison of one or two passages may reveal the worth of the new version. Take this section from the Letter to the Church at Ephesus. The Authorised Version runs :

" Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ :

That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive ;

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

The New Version<sup>18</sup> runs :

" So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God—to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ. We are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes. No, let us speak the truth in love ; so shall we fully grow up into Christ."

Our next illustration comes from I Corinthians XIII, Paul's famous hymn about love, where we give the Authorised American Standard and New Translation :

*I Corinthians XIII—Authorised Version*

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

<sup>17</sup> Erasmus—1516. Quoted on title page of Westcott and Hort, Greek Testament, First Edition 1885.

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians, IV, 13-15.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth : but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child ; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.

*I Corinthians XIII—American Revised Standard Version*

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, and kind ; love is not jealous or boastful ; it is not arrogant or rude.

Love does not insist on its own way ; it is not irritable or resentful ; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends ; as for prophecy, it will pass away ; as for tongues, they will cease ; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect, but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child ; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part ; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three ; but the greatest of these is love.

*I Corinthians XIII—New English Version*

I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I am without love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, and know every hidden truth; I may have faith strong enough to move mountains; but if I have no love, I am nothing.

I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I am none the better.

Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence.

Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance.

Love will never come to an end. Are there prophets? their work will be over. Are there tongues of ecstasy? they will cease. Is there knowledge? it will vanish away; for our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes.

When I was a child, my speech, my outlook, and my thoughts were all childish. When I grew up, I had finished with childish things.

Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me. In a word, there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of them all is love.

The contrast between the Authorised Version and the New Version comes out more clearly in a verse from the First Letter of Peter; the Authorised Version runs:

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ!”

With this we may contrast the New Version<sup>19</sup>:

“This water prefigured the water of baptism through which you are now brought to safety. Baptism is not the washing away of bodily pollution, but the appeal made to God by a good conscience; and it brings salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .”

Modern textual and historical criticism has been respected. The Lucan Version of the Lord's Prayer has not been expanded to correspond with the longer Matthaean version, as in the later texts<sup>20</sup>; more reliable manuscripts have also been followed in Luke's account of the Last Supper.<sup>21</sup> The little incident of the woman taken in adultery whose context is doubtful has been printed separately as an appendix

<sup>19</sup> I Peter iii. 21-22.

<sup>20</sup> Luke xi. 1-4. Cf. Matthew vi. 9-13.

<sup>21</sup> Luke xxii. 17-19. (N.B. footnote.)

to the Fourth Gospel, headed "An Incident in the Temple".<sup>22</sup> Hebrews is no longer described as a Pauline Letter. In Matthew xxvii 18, the excellent text has been adopted which reads: "There was then in custody a man of some notoriety, called Jesus Bar-Abbas. When they were assembled Pilate said to them, 'Which would you like me to release to you, Jesus Bar-Abbas, or Jesus called Messiah?'<sup>23</sup> Later manuscripts, out of mistaken reverence, could not tolerate the possibility of Bar-Abbas having the name Jesus, and hence omitted it; it is good to see the reading restored. On the other hand, in Mark vii 3 for some strange reason the New Version reads: "The Pharisees and the Jews in general *never* eat without washing their hands", following the Authorised Version which accepted the reading, *πυκνά*, "often", whereas the Revised Version followed the better manuscript tradition with *πυγμῆ*, "with the fist", or "up to the elbow", a more difficult, and therefore a more probable reading. In Acts xviii 5, the translation better conforms to Greek usage: "affirming before the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus". The word "publican", which has an entirely different meaning in the modern world from that which it had in Roman times, has now properly been translated as "Tax Gatherer". How much more telling as well as closer to the Greek is the translation "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners."<sup>24</sup> How admirable, too, is the definition of faith in Hebrews<sup>25</sup>: "And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see."

We may contrast, finally, the Authorised Version of James iii 18, "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in the peace of them that make peace", with the clear and intelligible rendering of the New, "True justice is the harvest reaped by peacemakers from seeds sown in a spirit of peace".

Sometimes the compilers "nod": In the Acts of the Apostles the term "High-ranking Officers"<sup>26</sup> occurs; the Oxford Dictionary gives an American reference of 1944 as the first occurrence of this horrid phrase; the word "commandant"<sup>27</sup> is more common in Germany than in the British world. The substitution of the term "darnel"<sup>28</sup> for the more familiar "tare", or "brush wood" for "branches"<sup>29</sup> in the account of Our Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday add little to clear thinking or euphonious expression, and are pedantic irritations. One inevitably misses certain familiar and hallowed phrases, and some of the great passages that have lived in our memories like that in Philippians about Christ, The Servant, humbling himself to the death of the Cross, or the fine passage in the same letter, commencing: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest" seem pedestrian and commonplace when the familiar rhythm has disappeared.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>22</sup> John viij. 1 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew xxvii. 16-18.

<sup>24</sup> Mark ii. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews xii.

<sup>26</sup> Acts xxv, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Acts xxi. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew xiii, 28 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Mark xi. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Philippians ii. 5-11 and iv, 8.

It would seem that in the Old Testament the writers will be a little more conservative, because obviously they are dealing with original documents that are more poetic in form. Quotations from the Old Testament are carefully distinguished in the New Version. The diction is more formal, and the sound nearer to that of the earlier versions, giving a dignity which impresses, especially when read aloud. We will take two or three examples where the Psalms or the Prophets are quoted extensively.

First, from the Acts, Peter's speech on the Pentecost to the crowd in Jerusalem :

“ But Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them : ‘ Fellow Jews, and all you who live in Jerusalem, mark this and give me a hearing. These men are not drunk, as you imagine ; for it is only nine in the morning. No, this is what the prophet spoke of : “ God says, ‘ This will happen in the last days : I will pour out upon everyone a portion of my spirit ; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy ; your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Yes, I will endue even my slaves, both men and women, with a portion of my spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the sky above, and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and drifting smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great resplendent day, the day of the Lord, shall come. And then, everyone who invokes the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”<sup>31</sup>

Or again,

“ For David says of him :

‘ I foresaw that the presence of the Lord would be with me always,  
For he is at my right hand so that I may not be shaken ;  
Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue spoke my joy ;  
Moreover, my flesh shall dwell in hope,  
For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,  
Nor let thy loyal servant suffer corruption.  
Thou hast shown me the ways of life,  
Thou wilt fill me with gladness by thy presence.’ ”<sup>32</sup>

And, finally, from the Epistle to the Hebrews :

“ For God never said to any angel, ‘ Thou art my Son ; today I have begotten thee ’, or again, ‘ I will be father to him, and he shall be my son ’. Again, when he presents the first-born to the world, he says, ‘ Let all the angels of God pay him homage ’. Of the angels he says,

‘ He who makes his angels winds,  
And his Ministers a fiery flame ’ ;

<sup>31</sup> Acts ii. 14-21, with quotation from Joel iii. 28-32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 25-28, quoted from Psalm xvi. 8-11.

but of the Son,

‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,  
And the sceptre of justice is the sceptre of his kingdom.  
Thou hast loved right and hated wrong ;  
Therefore, O God, thy God has set thee above thy fellows,  
By anointing with the oil of exultation.’

And again,

‘By thee, Lord, were earth’s foundations laid of old,  
And the heavens are the work of thy hands.  
They shall pass away, but thou endurest ;  
Like clothes they shall all grow old ;  
Thou shalt fold them up like a cloak ;  
Yes, they shall be changed like any garment.  
Byt thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.’<sup>33</sup>

No translation can be perfect, but this new English Bible, whether read aloud or silently, is a significant contribution to the literature of the Twentieth Century. It should ensure a more intelligible and more numerous circle of readers for “the most precious thing this world affords”. The preface states:

“ . . . always the over-riding aims were accuracy and clarity . . . We hope that we have been able to convey to our readers something at least of what the New Testament has said to us during these years of work, and trust that under the providence of Almighty God this translation may open the truth of the Scriptures to many who have been hindered in their approach to it by the barriers of language.”<sup>34</sup>

This panel of British scholars has not failed us in the way it has discharged its task.

Perhaps we can find again in our own time through a contemporary version of the Scriptures what Erasmus desired to bring about in the Sixteenth Century, when he published his edition of the New Testament:

“I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospel—should read the Epistles of Paul. And I wish these were translated into all languages, that they might be read and understood not only by Scots and Irishmen, but also by Turks and Saracens. (Dare we add for our day, also Russians and Chinese?) To make them understand is surely the first step. It may be that they might be ridiculed by many, but some would take them to heart. I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveller should beguile with their stories the tedium of his journey.”

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews i. 5-12, with quotation from Psalms ii-vii. 7; xlv. 6-7; cii. 25-27).

<sup>34</sup> N.E.B. Preface, pxj. 1961.

<sup>35</sup> Erasmus—Opera. Prefaces to Volumes Vi., Vii. Edition 1706.