THE ENGLISH BIBLE

its

RELATIONS

to

OUR LITERATURE

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It has not been my purp
pose in this limited work to go
an account of the early English
Bible translations and remain
nor to trace the general influence
of each in moulding the religi
ous history of the English race.

This is natural for a man ex
tended work. Nor do I propose
to inquire into the fidelity of the
principles of Christianity conten
ted in the Bible. Both because it
would be inappropriate in me
and because the accuracy of the
version is too well established
to be questioned here. But its
relations to our literature, con
sidered simply as a composi
tion, are worthy of considera-
tion. No other Christian people
can show a vernacular Bible
with such a history as the Eng
lish. So connected by high
justice and noble sacrifice, so
linked with the inmost life and
history of the people. The Engli
shavone produced a vernacular
translation of the Scriptures, and
of some other parts of the Bible; and several more or less complete versions of the Scriptures existed in French as early as the twelfth century. But there is no reason to believe that any considerable portion of it except the Psalter had ever been rendered into English till the whole work was undertaken by Wiclif in the latter part of the fourteenth century.

In most Protestant countries the national literature had commenced with the translation of the Scriptures into the tongue of the common people, which tongue the translation has fixed and preserved for all after time. This remark is true of Luther's German Bible, of the Danish Bible of 1530 and of the English versions of Wiclif and Tyndale.

Wiclif has been justly called "the Father of English Bible-translation" from the nations speaking the English
With the exception of Mochif's own writings, it was the first book of any magnitude ever written in the English language. But this ancient version has yet another claim on our regard. It furnished for all time, the type and pattern of the English Bible.
first time introduced into our speech.

It may seem that too great an influence is ascribed to the Latin version of the Scriptures. A work circulated only in manuscript and at a period when a few of the laity acquired even the first rudiments of learning, cannot, it may be thought, have made a very deep impression on the national character. But when we take into account the labor for more than thirty years, it will be seen that we look before the inventing of printing how enjoyed such advantage for becoming generally known.

A comparison with subsequent versions will show them to be all offshoots of the common stock. Improved in many important particulars so as to express with greater exactness the sense of the inspired originals, they are yet substantially in form and manner but reproduction
of Michel. While moreover we remark how intelligible it remained to the present day, how much closer it was to its phraseology to our own language of common life than that of Chaucer, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that it was this work which gave shape and fashion to our language, and by its continually increasing circulation gradually moulded into permanent uniformity the language of the people.

The difference between the version of Michel's and that of Sydalis was occasioned partly by the change of language in the course of two centuries and partly by the difference of the texts from which they translated; and from these two causes, Michel and Sydalis's versions differ more than Sydalis's which was completed in 1526, and the standard version which appeared only eighty-five years later. Not only does Sydalis retain
the general grammar of the structure
of the older versions, but most of
its verbal form. Hence, then,
must be considered as having
influenced the diction and theo-
reology which for five centuries
has constituted the sacred dia-
tect of the English tongue; and
Tyndale as having given to it
that facility and perfection which
have so adapted it to the expres-
sion of religious doctrine. It is
fortunate that Tyndale's tran-
slation of the New Testament was
executed before the sacred diction,
handed down from the time of
Methuselah, was yet affected by this
flood of Latinisms which a few
years later, produced so marked
a change in the English lan-
guage.

Methuselah gave England her
first Bible; Tyndale her first
Bible translated from the Hebrew
and Greek Scriptures. But for
the New Testament of Tyndale
a peculiar honor was reserved.
It furnished not only the base
but in great part the substance
of all that followed. The success
of Tyndale recognized in his
translation that imbres of the
master spirit; and while they
corrected its errors without scruply
by the increasing light of sacred
scholarship, they transferred
the body of it unchaged into
their own versions. It has been
laved down from generation
to generation, the most precious
inheritance of the English race.
and we at this day read it

large sections of our common
version the very words with which
Tyndale clothed the scriptures
for the men of his own age.
The revised version of the
Bible now in general use throughout
the English tongue is spoken was
executed by order of James I and
was completed and published
in 1611. This version has now been
we use two hundred and seventy
years and its sure and strong
English, simple yet dignified
style, and its common accept-
ance by persons of all classes and all shades of religious belief than
given it a combination of ad-
vantages over any rival.

Its relations to the English
language are for various reason
more important than those of
any other book; no Continental
translation has had so great
an influence on the philology
and literature of the language
to which it belongs. The English
Bible has been more universally
read by those who use its church
than any other version. In the
sixteenth century the English was
more thoroughly protestantized
than any other nation of the
world and consequently had
greater opportunities for reading
the Bible than elsewhere. Although
the philological as well as religious
influence of Luther's Bible was
very great yet it was only in-
directly affected the speech of
the Teutons. Again, the discussion
of the principles of the Reforma-
tion was continued longer in
England than elsewhere and the Bible was referred to in all funda-
mental questions of church and state.

In these reasons the Bible became known to the mind and
incorporated into the heart and
Church of the Anglican people to
a greater extent than any other
book ever entered into the life
of man, with the possible ex-
ceptions of the Hebrew Scriptures,
the Hymnical poems, and the
Arabic Koran.

The difference between the
Greek New Testament and that
of 1611 is scarcely greater than is
found between any two manu-
script copies of most modern
works which have undergone
frequent transcription. Although
particular points in the autho-
ized version were objected to by
partisans on both sides of the
controversy, and though the
English Prayer-Book continued
to employ an older translation
in its ritual, yet the new tras-
Latin commended itself so generally that it has superseded all others and now holds its position as the first classic in our literature. The highest example of purity and beauty of language existing in our speech.

Its relations to the language of which it is the parent and most beautiful example, are next to be considered. Hallam has remarked that, whether the style of King James's translation be the perfection of the English language or not, it is not the language of his reign. It may, adds Hallam, be a better English but not the popular English of the time in which it was written, only a revision of older translations.

The result of a comparison between the diction of the English Bible and that of the secular literature of England is that we have derived from the beginning of our literature a sacred and a profane dialect. The latter is far more precise and changeable, conse-
quietly the pronunciation must change. The former, on the other hand, is fixed and unchangeable and when it has once found a fitting expression in the words of a given language, there is no reason why those words should not continue to be used so long as the language continues to exist. There are many words in the English Bible which are technical and never were employed outside of this volume; there are others which belong both to the expression of religious doctrine and to the speech of common life, and of these latter some few have become obsolete so far as their every day use is concerned. But it is absurd to object to the language of the Scriptures because it is not the language of the day. How came and cold the words of that book, intimately as they are with the memory of childhood, could fall upon our ear if rendered into the English in which we speak
our common words and read our common books!

Many have felt, however, that it might be improved in clarity and accuracy, and in doubt it is true that King James's version has many and serious defects. It is full of minor errors, inaccuracies and inconsistencies if tested by the standard of modern Greek and Hebrew scholarship. The departures in the use of the article are so innumerable and the neglect of the Greek text is constant and arbitrary that they seem to have translated from the Vulgate rather than from the Greek. Moreover an vast amount of philological, geographical and historical knowledge has accumulated in the present century which is necessary for accurate translation. These considerations have at last resulted in the work of revision in 1871 by the combined labor of Biblical scholars.
from all the leading Protestant

denominations of Great Britain,
and North America. The New

Testament was completed at the
close of last year, just five hun-
dred years after Malby's transla-
tion. The Old Testament will
be finished in about two years.

Here are several points
of agreement and difference be-
tween the old version and the new.

Both were not new versions but
only revisions of preceding one
retaining substantially the same
kind of English. Both employ
the common yet dignified lan-
guage of sacred writers. Both
represent the best Biblical phil-
osophy of the age in which they
were made. The new revision
while retaining the calm and
vocabulary of the old removes
obsolete or misleading words
and phrases. If an it repre-
sents the latest stage of Biblical
philology and is far more ac-
curate and consistent though
perhaps with sacrifice of the
rhythm of the old version.

Such is in general is the character of the new revision. It now remains for the Christian public of England and America to pronounce the verdict on the revision and decide whether or not it shall take the place of the old in the English speaking world.

Here are but two grounds on which the attempt to change the Bible can be defended. Here are the ineptitudes of the re-
corrected version, and such a change in the language of ordinary life as removes it so far from the dialect of that version, that it is no longer intelligible. In regard to the latter point, I would say that I do not think the dictum of the Bible can be brought nearer the dialect of the present day without departing from the style of the original, in the same proportion as it is made to approx-
imate to more modern sound and a more diversified vocal.

...
alleged to that of the people of Biblical times than they have been at any subsequent period.

Three centuries later produced a great change in the national speech. It had in fact become too copious and too specific to serve any true correspondences with a simple and inartificial diction as that of the Christian Scriptures. What are questions may be raised respecting the accuracy with which particular

sacraments are rendered, there
There are far more difficult ques-
tions to solve than that of follow-
ing the golden mean between a
fascination for novelty and a too close
attachment to the time honored
and old. Both extremes are det-
imental but the loss of innova-
tion is the more dangerous be-
cause the future is more uncer-
tain than the past. There are chang-
is constantly going on in lan-
guage and connected with this
a corresponding change in ideas
for words and ideas are so in-