

THE VERSION OF 1611

PROPRIETY OF CALLING IT THE "AUTHORIZED VERSION," OR "KING JAMES'S VERSION"

REV. L. FRANKLIN GRUBER, M.A.
Minneapolis, Minnesota

During the Tercentenary year of what is popularly known as the "Authorized Version" of our English Bible renewed interest in that great work was manifested throughout the English-speaking world. From Protestant pulpits in Great Britain and America, regardless of denominational affiliation, were the excellences of that version and its wonderful history again recited. Great mass meetings, composed of adherents of practically every creed and addressed by eminent theologians and laymen, bore witness to the universal appreciation of that epoch-making work. The press, too, was not silent. Religious and secular periodicals seemed to vie with each other in the manifestation of their interest. Splendid articles and editorials and many news-items thus appeared in different publications; and it would almost seem superfluous, therefore, to add another article to the list. But surely the interest cannot be so abated as not to admit of still another word, especially on a question that was raised afresh, namely, Is it proper to speak of this version as "King James's Version," or as the "Authorized Version"? The two parts of this question, being closely associated, may be considered together.

Arguments of Some Writers against the Use of These Titles

While our Bible is popularly spoken of as the "Authorized Version," or as "King James's Version," nevertheless many writers agree in saying that there is no authority for calling it by either name. In his valuable work, *The Annals of the English Bible*, published in 1845, Anderson says, "If because that a dedication to James the First of England has been prefixed to many copies . . . it has therefore been imagined by any, or many, that the present version of our Bible was either suggested by this monarch; or that he was at any personal expense in regard to the undertaking; or that he ever issued a single line of authority by way of proclamation with respect to it, it is more than time that the delusion should come to an end." He then proceeds somewhat at length to show James's connection, or rather want of connection, financial or otherwise, with the work. While he does not directly say so in words, yet in effect he is clearly arguing against calling it "King James's Version." In trying to prove the line "Appointed to be read in Churches" to be virtually meaningless, he declares: "Now, as the Book never was submitted to Parliament, nor to any Convocation, nor, as far as it is known, ever to the Privy Council, James, by this title-page, was simply following, or made to follow, in the train of certain previous editions." In the passage of which this quotation is a part the burden of his argument evidently is to show the impropriety of calling it the "Authorized Version." In further proof of his own conclusions he then quotes similar conclusions of other writers upon the subject.

In a similar vein Professor Westcott in his excellent *History of the English Bible*, published in 1868, declares: "No evidence has yet been produced to show that the version was ever publicly sanctioned by Convocation, or by Parliament, or by the Privy Council, or by the King." He makes this statement by way of comment upon the line on the title-page, "Appointed to be read in Churches," and is in effect, therefore, calling in question its authorization, although he does not directly so declare.

These two authorities have apparently, and in some cases avowedly, been followed by many later writers upon this subject. Their statements have been quoted and pressed to their full conclusions. Moreover, the fact that no entry of this version can be found on the Stationers' Registers has also been pointed out as an additional proof against its authorization. The propriety of calling our Bible "King James's Version," or the "Authorized Version," has thus not only repeatedly been questioned, but it has often even emphatically been denied, especially during the Tercentenary year.

Their Arguments Inconclusive

It is true that no ecclesiastical or civil record that the version was publicly submitted to, or formally sanctioned by, Convocation, Parliament, the Privy Council, or even the King, has yet been found. Does it, however, follow that it was not thus submitted or sanctioned, simply because no actual record thereof is known to exist? And in an ecclesiastical matter of this kind must such a record, and particularly a civil record, necessarily have been made?

At any rate, even if it had been sub-

mitted to, and sanctioned by, the *Council*, we could have no official record of such transaction, since in a fire at Whitehall on January 12 (O.S.), 1618, all the books and registers of the Council from 1600 to 1613 were destroyed. Moreover, in the light of facts hereafter to be presented, we believe that such a public submitting to, or formal sanction by, the Council, the Convocation, the Parliament, or the King, was not absolutely necessary to allow of its being called the "Authorized Version." The fact, too, that no entry of it on the Stationers' Registers can be found, can be accounted for. It was probably, if not certainly, omitted because it was then regarded as only a revised version—a revision of the Bishops' Bible—for in cases of revised editions of books, registration was not considered necessary, and was generally not made.

Having briefly stated the inconclusiveness of the arguments generally adduced against the right of our Bible to the titles, "King James's Version" and the "Authorized Version," let us now more fully consider some of the evidence in proof of its right to these titles. This evidence may be presented under the following heads: (1) evidence from the history of its projection; (2) evidence from the history of its execution; (3) evidence from the book itself—its title-page, etc.; (4) evidence from its succession to the previous authorized version. The story of its projection is perhaps the most familiar part of the history of this version, since its main facts have often been recited. But for the purpose in hand it is necessary again to review that story from the viewpoint of this paper. Let us then consider:

I. Evidence from the History of Its Projection

It is well known that this version was projected at the Hampton Court Conference. The call for this Conference was issued under royal seal, October 24, 1603, to consider certain grievances in the so-called Millenary Petition of the Low Church, or Puritan, party—"things pretended to be amiss in the Church." The question to be discussed constituted differences between what might be called the High Church and the Low Church parties within the Established Church. The Low Church party spoke of themselves as "groaning under a common burden of human rites and ceremonies." Among the things they objected to was the use of the ring in the marriage service, the sign of the cross in baptism, and the surplice by the clergy. As to all such particulars they wanted the Prayer-Book revised. The subject of a new translation or revision of the Bible was not mentioned in their petition to the King and did not, therefore, enter into the purpose of the Conference. Its purpose rather was to consider a possible revision of the Book of Common Prayer, in which all their former attempts at revision during the reign of Elizabeth had failed.

The Conference accordingly met January 14, 16, and 18, 1604. After hearing various complaints pertaining to the service of the church, to ministerial discipline and the like, the first day's session ended without any settlement of differences.

On Monday, the second day of the Conference, the translations of the Bible used in the Prayer-Book were referred to and criticized, those translations being

taken from the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible. Then it was that Dr. Reynolds, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, spoke of the necessity of a new translation. According to Dr. William Barlow, a member of the Conference, whose account was published that same year, "He moued his Maiestie, that there might bee a newe translation of the Bible, because, those which were allowed in the raignes of Henrie the eight, and Edward the sixt, were corrupt and not aunswerable to the truth of the Originall." Dr. Reynolds no doubt included the Bishops' Bible of 1568 (during Elizabeth's reign) in this statement, probably regarding it as but a revision of the Great Bible of the reign of Henry VIII. This appears evident from the fact that the mistranslations he cited were also found in the Bishops' Bible. Then after mentioning Dr. Reynolds' citations of certain of these errors in translation, Dr. Barlow proceeds to give an outline of the plans the King then and there proposed, as follows: "Whereupon his Highnesse wished that some especiall paines should be taken in that behalfe for one vniforme translation, . . . and this to bee done by the best learned in both the Vniuersities, after them to be reuiued by the Bishops, and the chiefe learned of the Church; from them to bee presented to the Priuie-Councell; and lastly to bee ratified by his Royall authoritie; and so this whole Church to be bound vnto it, and none other." He also gives the King's direction that no marginal notes should be added.

This account of Dr. Barlow clearly ascribes the preliminary plan for a new version to the King himself, although he

is said to have received his suggestion from what Dr. Reynolds said. From the preface of the Bible it would even appear that Dr. Reynolds' objection to the former translations was made only as a last resort, or perhaps merely as a subterfuge. The words of the preface are: "When by force of reason they were put from all other grounds, they had recourse at the last, to this shift, that they could not with good conscience subscribe to the Communion booke, since it maintained the Bible as it was there translated, which was as they said, a most corrupted translation." Indeed, since the mistranslations of the Great Bible and the Bishops' version, which he cited, had already been corrected in the Geneva version, it might almost seem that he was courting the royal favor for the last named as the one to be used in the Prayer-Book. But, whatever Dr. Reynolds' motive, the King seized the opportunity to project a new version, the preface continuing from the above quotation, as follows: "And although this was iudged to be but a very poore and emptie shift; yet euen hereupon did his Maiestie beginne to bethinke himselfe of the good that might ensue by a new translation, and presently after gaue order for this Translation which is now presented vnto thee. Thus much to satisfie our scrupulous Brethren."

Thus accepting the criticism on the Bishops' and the Great Bible as to many alleged errors while hating the Geneva version because of some of its anti-monarchical notes, and recognizing the confusion caused by the circulation of these different and apparently irreconcilable versions in his realm, and believing this to be a national opportunity as