

INTRODUCTION.

ALL those who value the Scriptures may congratulate themselves on the general results of the work of the British and American scholars of various denominations to whom was entrusted the grave and arduous duty of amending the English Version of the Old and New Testaments. The Revised Version of the New Testament which appeared in 1881, and that of the Old Testament which was published in 1885, have brought ordinary English readers nearer to the true sense of the Biblical writers; an immense boon on many accounts, whatever views may be held respecting the Bible and its contents. It is of manifest importance that known errors should not be perpetuated either in the text or the translation of such a volume, and that the people generally should be put in possession, so far as was possible, of the information on these matters which has too long been the sole property of the learned.

The Bible will not suffer in their estimation of its true value from the better understanding of it which is thus placed within the reach of every one; and it will be no slight blessing, but something to be very thankful for, if the authority of the Bible shall cease to be quoted in defence of theological ideas which, though they appear in certain Creeds, are in truth neither reasonable nor Scriptural. The Scriptures, indeed, may now be searched by English readers with the conviction that they have before them a Version not indeed in all respects perfect, but much nearer perfection than the old Version, and as correct as it was perhaps possible to make it under the circumstances, and they can better

judge for themselves as to the real force of numerous texts which have played a great part in many a grave doctrinal controversy.

It has been asserted that not one of the numerous alterations which have been made in the Authorized Version affected 'one tittle or iota of the Christian faith,' meaning by this the sum of Church dogmas. How far this is true will be seen from the following pages. We believe that much of the ground on which certain Church dogmas have been maintained has been cut away by the removal of spurious passages and interpolated phrases, and by the correction of many serious errors of translation. The reader has only to compare the old form with the new, to understand how great has been the gain to liberal theology.

Amongst the number of new versions of the Scriptures which have been published by learned men connected with the Unitarian body, two will be here specially referred to, because they were issued by Unitarian societies, and might be understood therefore to represent at least a prevailing tendency of opinion at their respective dates: (1) The Improved Version of the New Testament, which was published by the Unitarian Fund Society in 1808. It was based upon the revised translation of Archbishop Newcome, Primate of Ireland. The Version was severely criticised by some learned Unitarians of the time, and it is not now referred to as by any means a model translation; but the extreme injustice with which it was treated by the mass of Trinitarian writers will be perceived when it is seen how many of the emendations now adopted in the Revised Version were anticipated by it. (2) The Revised Translation of the Old Testament, which the British and Foreign Unitarian Association published in 1862. It was the work of three well-known Unitarian ministers, Charles Wellbeloved, John Scott Porter, and George Vance Smith, afterwards a member of the New Testament Revision

Company. When either of these authors is quoted in the following pages, it will generally be with reference to his part in this 'Revised Translation' of 1862.

It would have been easy to show, had space permitted, that with regard to most of the emendations suggested by these and other learned men of the Unitarian body, they were supported by scholars of other denominations. References of this kind have been of necessity very few. If, however, an exception was to be made, all will admit the value and force of our quotations from Dean Alford, who, though a decided orthodox Churchman, was in every sense of the word a genuine scholar, and an earnest and able Biblical commentator.

The studious reader of the Revised Version will readily discover that many of its marginal notes are of special importance. They often serve as the true key to the meaning of the text, and whoever would use the Revision properly will carefully observe the variations of the margin. These notes are given in full in these pages at the end of each quotation. If not always pertinent to the occasion for which the texts are cited, they will be found generally instructive, and they will also illustrate to some extent the difficulties which are necessarily involved in the work of translation from old books written in languages no longer living.

It must be borne in mind by the reader that the object in view in this pamphlet is chiefly to point out certain passages in the Scriptures in which the Revision offers some amendment bearing upon particular controverted doctrines. It is remarkable that so many of these changes occur in what have been considered orthodox proof-texts, the Revisers adopting corrections which have long been contended for by Unitarian scholars. In a few instances, however, the alterations tend in the opposite direction. These are not unnoticed

in the following pages. But in the main the immense advantage appears on the side of what we have considered the more trustworthy readings and the more scholarly translations.

Justifying their theological views, as the older Unitarians did, by appeal to the Scriptures reasonably interpreted, and believing, as Unitarians still believe, that the true Scripture in its essence and spirit is not out of harmony with the practical religious doctrine of Christian Unitarianism, the upholders of that doctrine naturally joined with the learned men of other bodies in urging the necessity for amending acknowledged faults in the Authorized Version. But the interest of our study of the Bible has never been limited to the object of securing more enlightened views of disputed passages. The improvements made in the Revised Version are of various kinds, and many of them most important, which it did not lie within the purpose of these 'Notes' to refer to. One point, however, of some moment, not alluded to in these pages, should not be overlooked. In their Preface the Revisers of the Old Testament state in a few words what should be the aim of every genuine translation, 'to give to modern readers a faithful representation of the meaning of the original documents.' But, for the headings of chapters and pages which they were directed to revise they found of course no originals, and both Companies wisely agreed to pass over this instruction 'as involving questions which belong rather to the province of the commentator than to that of the translator.' Considering the marked theological bias of the old head-lines, especially in the Psalms and the Prophets, we cannot but regard their omission as a substantial liberal gain.

It should be observed that no attempt is here made to criticise the Revision, or to go behind either its readings or its renderings. It is dealt with simply as it will appear to the ordinary English reader. Nor is any question raised as to whether the New Version might not be still further

improved. The 'Notes' assume that the corrections in the Revised Version are such as the occasion called for, and proceed generally on the supposition that these amendments have been rightly made. Little is aimed at, therefore, beyond drawing attention to certain of the adopted or suggested changes which obviously bear upon well-known theological doctrines, and this with the more effect that the four Companies of Revisers represented in overwhelming numbers the churches in which these doctrines are held as more or less fundamental beliefs.

In the numerous controversies of past times in relation to these doctrines, it has been a common practice to treat Scriptural texts as though they were all of equal authority, without consideration of the particular circumstances under which they were written, or even of their contexts; and texts were pitted against texts taken with little discrimination from writings of different ages, and meanings were attributed to them which in many cases could not possibly have been in the intention of the authors. It is certainly not in the spirit of these 'Notes' to follow in the track of such unhistoric treatment of texts and their interpretation. When it is made clear what are the original texts, and what they really say, the way will be opened for a fair reconsideration of their theological value. The grand point is to know in regard to Scripture what are the real facts. And if as the result of such study the Scriptures are shown to present a very different view of certain doctrines, and even for some of them to furnish no authority whatever, not only will much have been gained in point of scholarship, but light is thrown upon the true development of religious thought, and the field of doctrine itself is cleared for new and better cultivation. It is a grand thing that the Scriptures should be more intelligently read, and that the immense fresh light upon their varied teachings may now be expected to produce its natural effect upon the religious thinking of the modern time.

There are, perhaps, many persons who will question the value of any amendments in controverted texts excepting as matters of ecclesiastical, or possibly of historic or antiquarian interest; and it may be regretted that the work of revising was not taken in hand long since, when the Bible was more implicitly and more generally believed in as the one great ultimate authority in religion and morals than is the case in these later times; but it is worth consideration whether even twenty or ten years earlier the revision could have been made as well as it has now been done. The age of textual controversy upon the lines just indicated is undoubtedly past, but surely not the period of reasonable, scientific study of the Scriptures, which, indeed, is a thing quite modern.

It has not been thought necessary to quote all the passages in every case of correction of which examples have been given; and, besides, the limits of space had to be considered, so that only a somewhat disjointed selection of texts could be made. This was unavoidable, especially if the Old and the New Versions were to be placed side by side, as seemed almost a necessity if the reader is asked to note certain differences between them.

But there will also be felt a sense of incompleteness and want of proportion in the treatment of the various topics; since though, as we have observed, the Revision gives manifest advantage to the liberal view of Scripture doctrine upon perhaps every point of its old contention with orthodoxy, in some cases there would naturally be only a small number of corrections, in others more, quite independently of the weight of subject; and it was not intended to offer a treatise on the whole theology of these questions. That is a work which may well be taken up anew by liberal theologians with the aid of the now accredited revisions. In these pages may be found some helpful material for a work of the kind, and this is all that the writer has undertaken to furnish.