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THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.¹

The task assigned is a delightful and a simple one. It is to review briefly, and in bare outline, a story which, in its fulness, is as fascinating as it is familiar. The whole story could not be told. It leads us forward in thought to work not yet complete, for men will continue to produce English versions of the Bible; and as we look backward, we are led through the labors of translators and copyists and saints and apostles and prophets to the very mind of God its Author and its Source. The character of this occasion and the necessary limitations of time confine our review to that portion of the process which was accomplished by men of England and which culminated in the production of that version, which, for three hundred years, has been in reality the Bible of the English-speaking world.

The interest centres about three great names: John Wyclif, William Tyndale, and King James the First. Of course there are others which we must mention and which we should hold in grateful remembrance to-day.

We might allow ourselves the pleasure of rehearsing the story, familiar to us all from childhood, of Caedmon the untutored keeper of cattle at the Abbey of Whitby, who leaves the banquet hall, when the harp is being passed, because he cannot sing; but as he falls asleep in the stable

¹ An address at the Tercentenary Celebration of the Publication of the Authorized Version, Princeton, May 9, 1911.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE.¹

In attempting to treat so spacious and many-sided a theme, within the time allotted to each of the speakers on this occasion, one can at most hope only to touch upon a few fundamental considerations. I shall confine myself to two main lines of thought, from which we may, as I trust, take a rapid yet fairly comprehensive view, alike of the general principles that underlie this subject and of their concrete expression and practical significance in the particular period of history to which these commemorative exercises direct our attention this morning. In the first place, then, let us consider the nature of the spiritual influence exerted by the Bible as such, and in the second place let us try to form some estimate of the range or extent of this influence, in the case of the English Bible, upon the spiritual life of the English-speaking people.

The Bible is emphatically the book of life. It is a collection of writings which, as a matter of observation and experience, are as vitalizing as they are vital. Directly or indirectly they all bear testimony to One who professed to come into this world that men might have life, and have it abundantly, and who, judged by the events of history, has brought life and immortality to light for a multitude whom no man can number. What the evangelist John says concerning the purpose of his own Gospel is true in a sense of all the Scriptures: "But these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in his name."

In its realization of this mission the Bible, it must be emphasized, renders its chief service to the individual. Its

¹ An address delivered in Miller Chapel on Tuesday, May 9th, at the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the publication of the Authorized Version of the English Bible.

message and its ministry are primarily personal. Its divinely ordained method of ennobling society as a whole is that of transforming, simultaneously indeed yet also separately, its constituent units. One by one, men, women, and children are to appropriate its treasures of truth and grace and life until, in the consummated kingdom of heaven, the race and the cosmos are fully redeemed. Even the subtle intangible yet most real and potent spiritual atmosphere or climate which we instinctively feel when we enter a community in which the human spirit has for many generations homed itself in the sacred Scriptures can and must be traced back to the influence of the Sun of righteousness upon those rivers of living water which, as the Savior affirmed, gush forth from the regenerated personality of each of his followers. Here as in every other vital process the personal factor is the determining one.

Nor is it difficult for us to understand how the Bible becomes the word of life to every one who really accepts its great message. For the unique excellence of the book is its profound, intense, all-pervading spirituality. It is the record of God's self-disclosure to his people for the benefit of the whole race, and as such a revelation it is fitted to be the bearer of a new and divine life for the children of men. Not that any magical power inheres in the mere letter of Scripture. It is the Spirit that giveth life—that same Holy Spirit who makes those whom he regenerates see with the certainty of an immediate intuition the perfect agreement between the new life that has sprung up in their own hearts and that wonderful world of spiritual truths and heavenly energies and transcendent glories which they behold in the Bible. In a word, the Spirit-led reader finds in the inspired volume as nowhere else him whom to know is eternal life. When this is said, everything is included. For as Principal Fairbairn reminds us, "Man's thought of God, of the cause and end alike of his own being and of the universe, is his most commanding thought; make it and you make the man." Does not the repeated experience of every one of us

testify that the unity of our own personal life emerges most clearly to our view when, as in the act of prayer, we stand face to face with the only true and living One? Man's relation to God is, in fact, the fruitful mother-principle that organizes the whole system of his thoughts, affections, aspirations, and purposes. Historically, as Dr. Kuyper, in his noble "Stone Lectures" has so well showed, there have been developed five characteristic expressions of this fundamental relationship between the finite and the Infinite. Paganism seeks and finds and worships God in the creature. Islam takes the antithetic extreme that cuts off all contact between God and the creature, isolating the former from human affairs and confining the latter within a realm of inexorable fatalism. Modernism in its atheistic and agnostic forms as seen in the shibboleth of the French Revolution, "No God, no master," tries to annihilate all relation to God, because he is conceived as a power hostile to the state and society. We are concerned more particularly with those other two comprehensive life-systems which have grown up side by side in our western world upon substantially the same biblical foundation, Romanism and Evangelicalism. With all they have in common, the former maintains that God enters into fellowship with man only by means of a middle-link, an external visible institution: it is the hierarchical church that stands between the soul and the source of its life. Over against this the Protestants, and notably of course that commanding constructive genius of the more thorough-going Reformed faith, John Calvin, proclaimed the epoch-making truth, that God, though standing in majestic sovereignty above all his creatures, can and does enter into immediate fellowship with them in the person of the Holy Spirit. In nothing is the contrast more striking than in the views of the two parties concerning the Scriptures themselves. The Romanist accepts the Bible as the word of God primarily because the church tells him it is such; the Protestant accepts the Bible as the word of God primarily because God himself by an immediate *testimonio Spiritus*

Sancti tells him it is such. To the Protestant the message of the Eternal in holy Scripture is self-evidencing. To him God here speaks directly in such wise that he is convinced that it is God who is speaking to him.

But not to dwell upon this particular application of the principle which led the Reformers to oppose the whole papal system, we would emphasize the fact that this self-authenticating revelation of God which the Bible records becomes the chief means for the divine regeneration of human life. When man finds the living God, especially as made known in the person and mission of his only begotten Son, then man also finds himself. He passes through a crisis of his spiritual being that little by little transforms from within his whole life. Standing before the holy Lord God Almighty the sinner feels his soul lacerated by the consciousness of his guilt. But the divine majesty is not completely unveiled until the white radiance of ineffable purity is seen to fall upon the Christ and then to break into the varied hues of that condescending love and redeeming grace that can stoop from the heavenly glories to the lowest abysses of human sin and shame and misery for the salvation of men. This is the marvel of marvels that the quickened soul, Spirit-led and Bible-fed, ever finds in the Gospel—God himself undertakes the sinner's cause. God is for him; God is with him; God is in him. Through the slow and oft-times painful steps of self-examination, and self-condemnation, and self-renunciation, the penitent rises, by the aid of a divine Redeemer, to the heights of true self-realization. The cross of Calvary, once the object of the guilty man's scorn and derision, becomes luminous with a hope that flashes its radiance towards all the horizons of his life and even beyond into the solemn grandeurs of the eternal world. Outside of the Scriptures, left to himself, man had lost himself amid the vague shadows of a transitory order of things; but now in the faith that is in Christ Jesus he finds himself, because he rediscovers his Father and his God and all the abiding realities of the spiritual universe. He has become a

new creation. His life has a new centre and a new circumference; new ideas and new ideals; new motives and new powers for the realization of the divine purpose that shapes his character and conduct and destiny, the attainment of Godlikeness. No wonder he calls the Bible his sacred book. For all his most precious interests whether of time or of eternity, are bound up with its life-giving words. It is the light, the inspiration, the comfort and joy of his needy soul as nothing else on earth can be. It is his chief means of spiritual grace and development, working silently day by day, like the sunshine, to enrich and beautify his life. As another has said, "It is thus the revelation of God to man; the revelation of man to himself; and the revelation of the spiritual constitution, meaning and destiny of that cosmic process by which our humanity has come into existence and by which also it will be ultimately 'delivered out of the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.' "

Such, then, is the function of the Bible as "the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit." Wherever, through the long centuries, the Scriptures have entered into the language, literature and life of a people, wherever their vital message has been appropriated by the human spirit, there these characteristic, life-quickenin, life-transforming, life-ennobling, life-spiritualizing influences of the Gospel have made themselves felt. And not only so, but from the day of Pentecost to the present time there has been a measurable correspondence, as if between cause and effect, between the study of these living oracles and the quantity and quality of the spiritual life of each generation.

When, therefore, we now undertake to estimate the range or extent of the spiritual influence of the Bible in its English translations, particularly in the Authorized Version, which by way of eminence has been *the English Bible* of the last three centuries, we are confronted by a fact that is as unique as it is significant: no people of the modern world have had their life more thoroughly moulded by the Scrip-

tures in the vernacular than have the people of English speech. How far this may have been due to the number and excellence of their biblical versions, or to that spirituality of mind which they had in common with other Teutons of the North, or perchance to the reflex influence of that great literature of theirs, which came to surpass all others not only in its composite richness, its intellectual maturity, its creative energy, but also in its ethical seriousness, its democratic sympathies and its religious earnestness, we need not pause to consider. The fact itself is plain enough. How then may we estimate its meaning? We might undertake a historical comparison between our English-American civilization and that based upon the mediaeval conception of the Bible in its relation to church and state. Or we might look at those more static expressions of the spiritual life of a people which we find in their literature and art. But in view of our having thus far spoken chiefly of the dynamic principles by which the Scriptures as such operate in the regeneration of the individual life, it will be more appropriate to pursue the parallel line of investigation and see how far these same principles have affected the various social institutes of the English-speaking world. We have seen that the primary service which the Bible renders is always a personal one, the spiritual improvement, amounting to a positive renewal and not a mere reformation, of every man, woman or child who truly receives its message of salvation. We now maintain that its secondary service to society as a whole is equally vital and, because of the vaster issues involved, even more important—that of maintaining and helping to realize the exalted ideals and the beneficent tendencies of those social institutions which at their best have grown up, if not solely yet chiefly, under the inspirations and the sanctions of the Gospel itself.

First, then, we have the family, the primary social institute, the cornerstone of the home, the school, the church, the state, the nation. It is, of course, based upon natural instincts of the most powerful character, "whose roots are in

the body, but whose flowers and fruits are in the soul." It secures through marriage and parentage a more intimate blending of physical and spiritual interests than does any other human relationship. While, therefore, we cannot say that it owes its very existence to the Bible, it is a truth worth our remembering at such a time as this, that the best homes that the world has ever seen have been those nurtured in the soil and atmosphere of the religious life of the countries in which the Bible has been supreme. The very words father and mother, brother and sister, son and daughter, in our own language, have been expanded beyond their limits in paganism and filled with the richest, because the most spiritual content. In the English-speaking world as nowhere else is that dictum verified, "Only where Christ is crowned king is woman a queen in her home." I am aware, indeed, that the Puritans of England and New England are not now held in the same high esteem they once were. Doubtless, we realize more thoroughly that they had their roughnesses, their austerities, their tempermental limitations. But for all that, their lives were centered in God and circumferenced by the spiritual. Their abodes on the earth were sanctuaries of prayer and Bible study and sacred song, and right well did they understand that most delicate and difficult but withal blessed task of inculcating in children the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom, and that disposition of mind and heart that seeks and finds God in the common things of life and puts the spirit of divine worship into all the work of life. Here, of a truth, in the purity and sanctity of the home, we have one of the open secrets of the spiritual excellence and supremacy of our Anglo-Saxon civilization. The courtesies, the proprieties, the humanities of our domestic life, its moral strength and beauty, we owe directly to those spiritual influences that have flowed into the sanctuaries about our hearths from the holy hill of Zion, "fast by the oracles of God."

Again, consider the varied blessings that the spiritual

life of the English people, quickened and nurtured as it was by the Bible in their vernacular, has brought to their own and other lands through the manifold activities of the second of our social institutes, the church. The church is the congregation of believers, the communion of those sharing the kindred life of faith in Jesus Christ. As such she is the most spiritual of all the organized forces in human society. I can only enumerate some of her most characteristic and important achievements.

The most obvious is that magnificent missionary enterprise that has sent English-speaking heralds of the cross unto the very ends of the earth. Two events, neither of which can be rightly understood except from the point of view of the religious history of the world, prepared the way for this unique glory of the island-home of our spiritual forefathers—the wresting from Spain by England of the supremacy of the seas, and the evangelical revival in Great Britain and America in the eighteenth century. Since then the spiritual life of the English-speaking people has never ceased to blossom and bear fruit in almost every land and clime; and, as if conscious of, and grateful to God for the source of its sustenance, it has, through the British and Foreign Bible Society and our own American Bible Society spread the good seed of the word broadcast over the earth in the form of over two hundred and fifty millions of copies of the holy Scriptures.

Equally noteworthy is the service of the church in the educational world. Without attaching any undue importance to that creation of the religious life of England, the modern Sunday school, which has the teaching of the Bible as the very ground of its existence, and without dwelling upon the varied service of biblical instruction which the missionary experts abroad and our ministers at home are more and more emphasizing as an essential in all true evangelization, I would allude to that splendid chapter in the spiritual development of mankind which the church has inspired by her constant devotion to the cause of the com-

mon school, the private academy, and the higher institutions of learning. Wherever the Scriptures have been rightly used they have not only showed the inadequacy of merely intellectual discipline, aesthetic culture and utilitarian training, but have also dignified and sanctified art and science and learning by making them the true interpreters of the glory of that God who desires his children to know him in the works of his hand in nature as well as in the special revelation of his grace.

And what shall we say of the numberless humanitarian, charitable and philanthropic institutions and movements of which in all ages, and never more than in the English-speaking world of to-day, the church has been the fostering mother? With all their defects and limitations they have been among the crowning glories of our Anglo-Saxon civilization. The Gospel has heroically grappled with the problem of evil and has done much toward its solution by means of a myriad-fashioned social helpfulness. And mark you, the church has been enabled to render this service herself and to inspire even those outside of her membership to aid her in the task, only by means of that basal principle of her faith which we have emphasized: in the presence of the eternal God, the loving heavenly Father, every human life is sacred, and inasmuch as the redemption in Christ Jesus makes a brotherhood of all believers, the strong are constrained to bear the burdens of the weak, the afflicted and the unfortunate. It is because the English Bible has entered so profoundly into the spiritual life of the English-speaking people that these social duties of the Gospel have been so well understood and, on the whole, so faithfully performed by them.

Still further, it has been the church, the company of those who owning allegiance to Jesus Christ seek to realize his ideals of moral character and conduct, that has done most, by precept and example, to lure and lift the souls of men to higher planes of ethical living. By common consent the Scriptures are the most potent influence to vitalize and

develop the moral life of the race. They purge and enlighten conscience; they energize and determine the will of man for righteousness as no other force can do, because they bring motives deep as eternity to bear upon his choices and because they present as the model for our lives One who has not only created humanity's ideal of perfection but can also bestow the power that transforms his worshippers into a living likeness to himself. As read in the privacy of the home, but even more as proclaimed in the great congregation, where deep answers unto deep in the experience of the common faith, the Bible moves us, guides us, checks us, and sustains us in our efforts to realize the manifold excellence of the life that is dedicated to the high ends and aims which it keeps before us. The much praised moral earnestness and sobriety, the ethical gravity and impressiveness of our English and American literature are due chiefly to the sublime ideas and ideals of the Bible and the embodiment of these in the conduct of the men and women who have adorned its teachings by their lives.

I can only allude to the last great service which the Bible has rendered through the organized church; I mean its constant influence in keeping religion itself pure and spiritual. Divine worship is grounded in the very instincts of the soul and is therefore a universal phenomenon in human life. But we need to remember that it is the Bible above all other forces that makes and preserves spiritual religion as a living reality, safeguarding it from superstitious errors, sensuous practices and conventional formalism. It does this by means of its basal doctrine that the supreme object of our interest and devotion is a spiritual Being of infinite holiness who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, with loving gratitude and joy, it may be, but ever also in humility and purity of heart. Thus by virtue of the cleansing and strengthening currents of their spiritual influence the Scriptures have been the chief agency for ennobling and sanctifying religious worship itself in Protestant England and America.

The third social institute that reflects, and therefore helps us to gauge, the influence of the Bible upon the spiritual life of the English-speaking people is the state.

It is, of course, no accident of history that the most democratic governments, those guaranteeing the largest measure of popular freedom, have been reared in those countries in which the Gospel has most firmly established itself. For while Christianity as such favors no one political system as against another, it always and everywhere brings to bear upon a nation's life three far-reaching fundamental principles that slowly but steadily make for republicanism in the state as well as in the church. First, it makes its appeal, as we have seen, primarily to the individual, calling upon him to exercise the prerogatives of his manhood as a free agent in the highest sphere of his thought and action, the realm of his relation to his Maker and Redeemer. Secondly, it recognizes and enforces the sacredness of his own personality as a social unit, requiring him, if need be—and in England the need arose more than once—to assert against the "divine rights" of unjust kings, the diviner rights of his own enlightened conscience. And thirdly, it places all men, rich and poor, king and subject, master and slave upon substantially the same moral plane before God as the one sovereign Lord and Judge of all. Nothing short of these sublime spiritual conceptions and convictions inculcated by the Bible could ever have shattered the despotsisms of caste and class and secured the political enfranchisement of the individual citizen to the extent to which we find it developed in the modern world, first of all in the Calvinistic Netherlands, then in England in the wake of the "glorious revolution" of 1688, and best of all in the constitutions of our several commonwealths and the federal government. It is because of the presence of these dynamic principles of the Gospel in our life and literature that Wordsworth's lines are true—

"We must be free or die who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake."

And the best guarantee for the perpetuity of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, is found in those supplementary truths of the Bible that there is no liberty worthy of the name save that which exists in obedience to righteous authority; that there can be no just laws or ordinances among men unless they are grounded in the eternal Righteousness; and that the glory of every state, as of every individual citizen, depends upon an ever-deepening conception of, and an ever-increasing devotion to, the revealed will of the King of kings and the Ruler of all nations.

And now lastly, we have the great English-speaking race itself as the most extensive and the most important of the social expressions of the spiritual influence of the Bible in the modern world. Anglo-Saxon civilization is, indeed, a complex product, to which many forces, some of them purely material, have contributed. But its noblest features, its best tendencies, its brightest hopes are simply inexplicable apart from that Book of books, the very translations of which into the vernacular have, through the passing centuries, been the dominating force in creating the first great bond that holds the Anglo-Saxon world together, our common speech; and the spiritual revelations of which have touched these mighty sister nations at a profounder depth of their common interests than has any other factor that has ever entered into the life of either of them.

Friends, what means this universal thanksgiving and joy on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in connection with those two series of events that are in all our thoughts to-day, in which the King of England and his humblest subject and President Taft and the rank and file of our citizenry are so deeply interested—the various celebrations being held in both countries to commemorate the publication three hundred years ago of this noble English version of the Bible, and these good substantial steps, quite unprecedented in the history of the race, that are being taken on both sides of the water to insure by means of a permanent tribunal of

arbitration lasting and honorable peace between Great Britain and the United States of America? One sentence tells the whole story: through the written word Christ the incarnate Word is coming forth into our Anglo-American civilization in the glory of his Saviorship, conquering and to conquer, after the divinely appointed order of Melchizedek, the King of righteousness first of all, and after that also the King of peace.

So to-day we give God thanks, and ascribe to him all the glory, for the remarkable influence in the past of the English Bible upon the spiritual life of the English-speaking people; and for the future, we pray, for ourselves and for all the tribes and kindreds of the people on the face of the earth

"Word of life, most pure and strong
Lo! for thee the nations long,
Spread, till from its dreary night
All the world awakes to light."

Princeton.

FREDERICK W. LOETSCHER.