

THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

PERIODICAL FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BIBLE TRANSLATORS

Editor: Rev. W. J. Bradnock. Editorial Board: Dr. E. A. Nida,

Rev. Dr. W. C. Somerville and Dr. J. L. Swellengrebel

VOL, 6, No. 3, JULY 1955.

Editorial Comment

Whenever a new version or revision is nearing completion, it usually happens that various organisations look to the Bible Societies to supply them with suitable propaganda material for press purposes. Looking back over the last five years, I am impressed with the singular difficulty of doing justice to the achievements of translators and revisers in this way. There is an extraordinary sameness about the stories that are written and the illustrations submitted which is only rarely relieved by a touch of romance or a flash of penetrative insight. To some degree this is, perhaps, in the nature of the case, but nevertheless it is a pity. I am thinking at the moment of the photographs which so often accompany the formal accounts of the work of a committee. They show four or five people seated round a table laden with books and sheaves of papers. One assumes that these are the various grammars, dictionaries, works of reference, commentaries and versions used in the translator's task. One sometimes wishes that these books could tell what they have heard of the endless debate and discussion that has raged about them at the various stages of the work. If only that were possible, the tale would lose its dullness altogether. Few can know to what extent these volumes have helped or hindered, and not least is that true of the commentaries.

I once heard an experienced missionary of many years' standing give a casting vote against the publication of a new commentary on Romans in an important Indian language, written by a promising young Indian scholar, on the grounds that "no one reads commentaries today". It need not be added that he was not himself a Bible translator. Since then, I have met more than one actually engaged on revision or translation work who has been content to disregard all commentaries and rely apparently on linguistic ability and mother wit to see the job through. These, however, are quite exceptional people. For the most part the translator knows that he just cannot afford to by-pass the work of Biblical scholars in this way. His real problem lies elsewhere. From the great mass of material available, which commentaries shall he use? What are the criteria in this field of true and dependable scholarship and in the manifold field of Biblical study, language, text, doctrine, theology and exegesis, what constitutes an 'authority'? No one answer to these queries will satisfy everyone. As long as translation work goes on,

different individuals will pit their 'authorities' against one another in endless debate. Some will be favoured because of names long hallowed by past association, others because they are the latest thing from the press, some because they represent particular schools of thought and yet others because they support certain doctrinal or theological positions.

The discriminating translator will probably learn in time to evaluate all the commentators for their particular virtues or vices and use them accordingly. But how does one learn to discriminate and what really constitutes a 'good' commentary for the translator's purposes? It may be said at once that very few, if any, of the standard commentaries have paid any special regard to the peculiar problems which the translator and reviser has to face in the fields of linguistics or cultural anthropology. This type of commentary is yet to be produced and in time it may well fall to the Bible Societies to sponsor it. Some commentaries, still fairly widely used, are out of date in their information on the Greek and Hebrew text as they ante-date the significant textual discoveries of the twentieth century. That is not to say that all such commentaries are completely useless, but it does mean that on textual matters they cannot be wholly trusted. And where exegesis is dependent on a right understanding of the text, this obviously can be a serious matter.

We believe that the Rev. C. K. Barrett's series of articles on the subject of commentaries in general will be of very considerable value to our readers, not only by making more widely known what is available, but in helping to assess this whole field of Biblical literature from the translator's point of view. It is a subject of the utmost importance and we hope that Mr. Barrett's treatment of it will elicit further enquiry and comment in due course.

The Origin and Nature of the Chief Printed Arabic Bibles

John A. Thompson

Part III

III. The Smith-Van Dyck Version

Title: *Al-kitāb al-muqaddas ay kutub al-'ahd al-qadim wa al-'ahd al-jadid, qad turjima hadīth min al-lughah al-'ibrāniyyah wa al-lughah al-yūnāniyyah*. Beirut: American Press, 1865.

A. Origin of the Smith-Van Dyck Version

This version might be called a result of the world-wide surge of the Protestant missions in the 19th century, which carried missionaries of the American Board to Syria in 1819. One of the impulses to the production of the Smith-Van Dyck Version was the unsatisfactory nature of the Propaganda edition pointed out above. Much of the credit for