

For obvious reasons Translator's Handbooks have concentrated on the text and said relatively little about the historical circumstances in which it originally functioned. This commentary reminds us that knowledge of the historical background is indispensable when we study (and translate) letters written in crisis-situations. Translators should take Brown's commentary very seriously.

M. DE JONGE

Hammond, Gerald: **The making of the English Bible**. Manchester: Carcanet New Press 1982. 249 pp., £9.95.

This is a study of the principal English versions of the Bible from Tyndale to the Authorized Version (including the Douai-Rheims translation). The author, who lectures in English Literature in the University of Manchester, approaches his subject from the literary angle, not as a biblical scholar. He concentrates for the most part on the Old Testament, which (among other things) "gives the widest range of literary genres and kinds to test the translator" (p. 13).

One of the aims of the book is to analyse the stylistic relationships between the translations and their original. In the pursuit of this aim Mr. Hammond is better equipped than most lecturers in English Literature: he is familiar with Hebrew and can give a competent assessment of the renderings of the Septuagint and the Vulgate.

The "Bible English" for which Tyndale set the pattern follows the syntax of Hebrew as closely as English idiom will allow. But with Tyndale this was not a special kind of English used only in translating the Bible: Tyndale's account of his unsuccessful approach to the bishop of London in 1523 shows the same kind of co-ordinate structure as his version of the Pentateuch—a structure well calculated to maintain narrative suspense. In this Tyndale shows himself superior to Jerome: "there is, after all, not a syntactic form more certain to destroy narrative suspense than the ablative absolute" (p. 29).

When he wishes to compare the translation technique of Tyndale and his successors with that favoured by modern translators, Mr. Hammond chooses as his basis of comparison the best of the modern English versions—the New English Bible. The scholarship of the N.E.B. translators is far in advance of anything attainable in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but one thing they lack: a feeling for words, an appreciation of the impact which the sound, as well as the sense, can make on the hearer or reader of the Bible. Thus Ezekiel 33:1-6, which in the A.V. is "a powerful prophetic warning", becomes in the N.E.B. "something more like a civil defence handout" (p. 6). It may indeed be unfair to the N.E.B. translators to blame them for failing to achieve what they were incapable of achieving, but the point that Mr. Hammond makes here is highly relevant to the goal of dynamic equivalence. Some of the newer versions seem, he thinks, to presuppose that "modern readers are idiots incapable of any kind of imaginative interpretative response" (p. 3).

One of the most valuable features of the book is its identification of the particular strengths and weaknesses of the versions that are reviewed. What Tyndale lacked in scholarship he made up for in sound judgment: where the A.V. departs from him, it does not invariably improve on him. As for Coverdale, his confessed ignorance of "the tongues" meant that, where Tyndale

failed him, he exercised his aesthetic judgment in choosing among other men's versions, "and this, fortunately, was more than sound" (p. 68). The superiority of the Great Bible over Coverdale's first version (1535) was largely due to his having more scholarly Continental translations at his disposal (especially Sebastian Münster's Latin translation) for the later version. Even if he had no knowledge of Hebrew, he seems, in Mr. Hammond's opinion, to have "intuitively grasped the essence of Hebrew poetry" (p. 69).

The achievement of the Geneva Bible receives high and well-merited praise: one point of interest is that repeatedly, where Geneva gives an idiomatic rendering in the text, reserving the more literal translation of the Hebrew for the margin, the A.V. puts the more literal translation in the text. The Geneva translators tried to make sure that readers should understand what they read: this was the main purpose of their copious marginal notes. But even if "they which crepe into houses" (2 Tim 3.6) are, as the margin has it, "monkes, friers, and suche hypocrites", it is far-fetched to see in their victims, the "simple women" who are "euer learning, and are neuer able to come to the knowledge of the trueth", a class whose type is Mary Tudor, while "Elizabeth is being warned not to make a similar error" (p. 91).

In the Bishops' Bible Mr. Hammond can find no strengths, only weaknesses. The translators of the A.V. might pretend, to please King James, that their version was based on the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible, but they knew very well that Geneva was incomparably the better version, and *it* was the "good one" which they undertook to "make better".

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NEW

Final Report of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Commentary, volume 1, by Dominique Barthélemy, published by the UBS and the Biblical Institute of Fribourg University (Editions Universitaires Fribourg/Suisse and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1983, price 204 Swiss francs).

UBS Catalog of Scholarly Publications, first edition January 1983. The first international UBS catalogue of scholarly editions and translation helps. Obtainable from UBS, P.O. Box 81 03 40, 7000 Stuttgart 80, German Federal Republic.

Synopsis of the Four Gospels, edited by Kurt Aland. This new edition presents the English portion of the Greek-English edition of the *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*. Obtainable from the American Bible Society, P.O. Box 5656, Grand Central Station, New York NY 10163. Price \$5.95.

Students of discourse structure as applied to Bible translation will be interested in "Discourse Structure in Matthew's Gospel", by David J. Clark and Jan de Waard, published as Special Issue 1, 1982, of the journal *Scriptura*, published by the Department of Biblical Studies, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, at 3.50 Rand.