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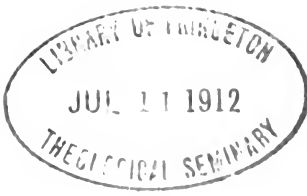

[From the New Englander and Yale Review for October, 1887.]

THE ENGLISH BIBLE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

By Professor T. W. Hunt.

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Article II.—THE ENGLISH BIBLE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

The two greatest treasures in the possession of any Christian nation are the Bible in the vernacular and the vernacular itself. Though it is true, as Archbishop Trench has stated,* "that a language is more and mightier in every way than any one of the works composed in it," this advantage in favor of the language is reduced to a minimum if not indeed rendered doubtful, when we come to compare it with its expresssion in the Holy Scriptures. Of no nation of modern times is this assertion truer than of English-speaking peoples. Germany excepted, there is no civilized country where the Bible and the language alike have done more for the best interests of the population, and more in which the mutual relations of these two great educational and moral agencies have been closer and more marked. Among the English, as elsewhere, no sooner did Christianity enter and obtain a foothold than the necessity was felt of having the Word of God translated into the home-speech. It was so in the days of Ulfilas, Bishop of the Goths. As soon as his countrymen along the Black Sea became converts to Christianity, in the early part of the fourth century, it was their earnest desire to possess the Bible in their own tongue. To this work the learned and holy bishop was competent and inclined. About 360, A. D., he completed the translation of the New Testament from the original Greek and a portion of the Old Testament from the Septuagint version into the Moeso-Gothic. It was in a true sense about the first written example of a Germanic language.

It was thus with the old Syriac, Latin, Armenian, and Slavonic versions, all of them being prepared at the demand of the people, upon the introduction of Christianity. It was so in the case of the Old Saxon metrical version of the continental tribes—the Heliand of the ninth century, in which the unknown author, at the supposed request of Louis, the Pious,

* Trench's *Study of Words*, p. 29.

sought to paraphrase in verse the sacred work for the use of the people. This was prepared after that a rude form of Christian faith had been brought to them by the agency of Charlemagne and his followers.

Precisely thus the English Bible finds its historical origin on English soil just after Gregory of Rome sent forth Augustine, A. D. 597, to carry Christianity to Kent. Shortly before this, Ethelbert, King of Kent, by his marriage with Bertha, a Frankish Christian queen, had become favorably disposed to the new doctrine and worship, so that he received the Romish missionaries with kindness, in the province of Canterbury. Intellectual and literary activity was at once awakened. Schools were established and worship observed. Among the books and treasures sent to Canterbury by Gregory, the most valuable by far were two copies of the gospels in the Latin language, one of which is still in the library of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, and the other, in the Bodleian, Oxford. The people were now more than eager for the vernacular scriptures. The establishment of Christianity had made this need imperative, and it was on the basis of the Oxford copy of the Latin Gospels—the *Vetus Italica*—that the first copies of the Scriptures were prepared in the native language and circulated throughout the center and north of England. Hence, as early as the eighth century, A. D., Bede, of Durham, and Boniface, of Devonshire, were engaged, respectively, in the further translation of the Bible and in preaching the gospel to the kindred tribes beyond the sea. The contemporaneous history of the English Bible, and the English language may be said to have begun at this early period, and has so continued with but little deviation to the Westminster version of our day. It will be our pleasing purpose in the discussion before us to trace this progressive history as it moves along the successive centuries, and thus to evince the large indebtedness of our English speech to our English Bible.

I.—English Versions and Translations of the Bible.

As to the exact date of the earliest translations of the Bible into English, tradition and history are so mingled that it is quite impossible to be accurate. As Bosworth suggests, the translators

and translations are alike a matter of doubt. It is, however, safe to say that leaving out of view the discursive work that was done by unknown scholars and copyists in the seventh century, a more specific work of translation began about the eighth century in the persons of Aldhelm, Guthlac, Egbert, and Bede. This was continued in the ninth and tenth centuries by Alfred and Aelfric. We learn authoritatively from Cuthbert, a pupil of Bede's, that his venerable teacher, who died in 735, A. D., was closing his translation of St. John's Gospel into English, as his life was ending. This, in all probability, was but the last of a series of gospel versions, inasmuch as we know that in the line of commentary work Bede gave special study to the four evangelists. In fact, other translations of the gospels may have existed before this. It is well authenticated, indeed, that in the early part of the same century (706) a translation of the Gospels was made by Egbert, as also of the Psalms, by Aldhelm. In the two following centuries, Alfred, and Aelfric, the Grammarian, carried on the same useful work. The illustrious king is supposed to have prepared a partial version of the Psalms and Gospels. Aelfric, who died in 1006, completed the translation of the Heptateuch—the first seven books of the Bible, together with a portion of Job. He is thus mentioned by Morley "as the first man who translated into English prose any considerable portion of the Bible."* In addition to this prose rendering, it is not to be forgotten that as far back as the middle of the seventh century the paraphrase of Caedmon gives us a metrical version of a large portion of the Christian scriptures, the poem, as now extant, containing substantial parts of Genesis, Exodus, Daniel and of The Life of Christ.

Thus early was the Word of God vernacularized. As soon, in fact, as the English nation and church began their existence; as soon as education entered and the English people started on their great work of evangelization, their bible was accessible in their own tongue. It at once began to exercise its influence in the native language in all those beneficent forms in which it is still at work. It is most suggestive to note that the two great agencies started historically together at the call of Christianity.

* Morley's *English Writers*, vol. i., part I.

Fragmentary and tentative as many of their first versions are, so that there is now extant of that time but little save the Gospels, Pentateuch, and Psalms, what does remain is all the more valuable and is quite enough to establish that connection of close dependence of which we are speaking. Imperfect as these translations are, there is no subsequent period in which the secular and the inspired are so intimately blended. With Bede and Aelfric, English was eminently biblical. All the leading authors of the time were holy men. Homilies, Christian biographies, and church histories were the staple form of prose production. Where actual bible translation was not done, they did the very next thing to it, in furnishing complete paraphrases of the Bible for the schools and the common people. In these first English times (449–1066) the language was in a marked degree the medium of scripture and scriptural ideas. "In the latent spirit of this," writes Morley, "will be found the soul of all that is Saxon in our literature. The Bible was the main book in the language and controlled the character of all other books." *

In what may be called the second or intermediate period of our language and our versions (1066–1550), attention should be called, as before, to the translations in metre. The most prominent of these is, *The Ormulum* (1215), by Orm. It is a metrical paraphrase of those portions of the gospels arranged for the respective days of church service, and as the author states in various forms, is designed to secure practical religious ends. What is known as the Surtees Metrical Psalter, probably, belongs to the early part of the fourteenth century. About 1340, Richard Rolle de Hampole translated the Psalter and Job into Northumbrian English to give to those people the same privileges that the people of Kent had earlier received in prose versions. As to these prose versions, we notice a prose Psalter by William of Shoreham as early as 1327, prepared especially for the Englishmen of Kent. Of the English Bible of John of Trevisa, to which Caxton refers and which is placed at 1380, no reliable record is found. This tradition is perchance the origin of Sir Thomas More's belief that the Bible was rendered complete into English long before the time of Wycliffe.

* Morley's *English Writers*, vol. i., part I., p. 299.

The first translation of the entire Bible into English is that of Wielif, assisted by Nicholas de Hereford. It was based on the Vulgate, and issued (N. T.) in 1380. As it was prepared nearly a century before the introduction of printing into England (1474) it was circulated in manuscript only, as the versions preceding it had been, and was not finally committed to print till several centuries later (N. T. 1731, O. T. 1850). For about a century and a half, however, up to the time of the next and greater version (1525), it was the Bible of England and the basis of English. Its revision by Purvey in 1388 was a revision only, and made a good translation a better one. Connected, as Wielif was, with the university of Oxford for nearly half a century, and versed, as he was, in the divinities, no one was better qualified to do that great initial work that was then needed, to embody the Scriptures permanently in the English tongue, and through them to open the way for the English Reformation. English education as well as Protestant English Christianity owes him a debt that can never be repaid. His work was philological and literary as well as biblical and moral.* Although in a council at Oxford, in 1408, it was decreed "that no man hereafter read any such book now lately composed in the time of John Wielif or since," this first great version could not be thus suppressed. The Lollards were persecuted and scattered but the Bible remained, and Foxe was able to write "that in 1520 great multitudes tasted and followed the sweetness of God's Holy Word."†

In 1525–32 appeared Tyndale's Version, containing the New Testament with the Pentateuch and historical books of the Old Testament. As the first *printed* English translation it stands conspicuously superior to all that had preceded it. From the additional fact, that it was not based on the Vulgate as was Wielif's, but on the original text of the Hebrew and Greek, it was commended with increasing emphasis to the biblical student and reader. It is eminently natural, therefore, to hold with the great majority of Christian scholars that the history of our present English Bible practically begins with Tyndale's. It has been accepted as the basis of all later ver-

* See Dr. Storrs on Wielif.

† Westcott's *History of the English Bible*, pp. 17, 18, 20.

sions, and gathers in its preparation new interest from the circumstance that Luther was at work at about the same period (1532–34) on that translation of the Scriptures into German which marks the settlement of standard German prose. The simplicity of Tyndale's Bible is a sufficient confirmation of his prophecy, that the plough-boys of England would know more of the Word of God than the Pope himself did. Its plain, concise, and telling English is just what might have been expected from a man of his learning, character, and spirit. Versed as he was in the original tongues of the Bible, and thoroughly devoted to the needs of the common people of England, he succeeded alike in his fidelity to the ancient text and in preparing a version for the use of all classes of the country. He was especially careful to reject the "ink-horn phrases" of the schoolmen and the schools. His method is natural, facile, terse, and vigorous, and affords the best example extant of the precise status of the English tongue at that particular stage of its historic development. It became substantially the basis of that later and still better version which for more than two centuries and a half has been accepted on all sides as the best prose specimen of standard English, while it is through this version that Tyndale's translation becomes vitally connected with the Westminster Version of the present era. Following Tyndale in this intervening period between First and Modern English, are three or four versions simply needing mention. Coverdale's translation (1535), from the Dutch (German), and Latin, completed what Tyndale had left incomplete at his death. It was, in a true sense, the first *entire* printed English Bible.

Matthew's or Roger's Version (1537), was based on the two preceding, and revised by Taverner's in 1539. It is supposed to have been the first version in English that was formally sanctioned by royal authority,—the first really *authorized* version.

Cranmer's or the Great Bible, (1539–40), was on to 1568 the accepted Bible of the English church, and especially notable as the version from which most of the Scriptures of the English Prayer-Book were taken. From this time, the preparation of English versions ceased for a while. Not only so, but new

animosity seemed to arise from royal and subordinate sources looking to the prohibition and permanent suspension of such endeavors. The accession of Edward VI. however, changed the condition of things; Bible work was resumed, so that at the close of the short reign of Bloody Mary, hostile as she was to the Protestant Scriptures, other versions were in preparation, and a new and wider era was opened both for the Bible and the language. In this Middle English Period, therefore, as in the First, the connection of these translations with the progressive development of English speech is everywhere visible. In fine, the main work was either in Scripture itself or along the lines of scriptural teaching. Whatever the literary expression of the language in prose and poetry may have been or whatever the separate study of the language on purely secular methods, the Word of God in English was *the* book by way of distinction and was engaging the best thought of the time.*

In the Modern English Period (1550–188–), three or four new versions appear.

The Genevan version (1557–60), was prepared by Protestant refugees in the city of Geneva. It was based on Tyndale's translation, was far less costly and bulky than the Great Folio Bible, and in connection with the version that followed it, was the Bible of England for more than half a century. It is of special biblical interest in that it was the first translation using verses and notes, and of special philological interest as being the first in which the old black letter type was abandoned for the common Roman type of modern time. In this particular, it clearly marks the introduction of the modern English Bible and modern Bible-English. It might be called the Bible of the Presbyterians, as most of the Genevan refugees from the Marian persecutions were of that order, and as the occasion of its preparation was partly found in a protest against the extreme Anglicanism of Cranmer's version preceding it. It was notable for its homely diction and so commended itself to the middle classes of the people as to hold its ground far into the reign of James.

* For specimens of the texts of these earlier versions, the reader may be referred to Mombert's *Hand-Book of English Versions.*

The Bishop's Bible of 1568 was made on the basis of Cranmer's and under the supervision of Archbishop Parker. Most of the scholars at work upon it were bishops of the English church. It is sometimes called "The Translation of the Church of England." Whatever its merits, it never superseded the Genevan version. It is supposed that its circulation was scarcely one-fourth that of its competitors, while it was largely due to the unseemly contest for supremacy between these two versions—the Presbyterian and the Anglican—that the preparation of the great version of 1611 was suggested and hastened.

King James' version (1607–11), may be said to have originated in a conference at Hampton Court between the King and certain others, Presbyterians and Episcopalians—with reference to promoting ecclesiastical unity in the kingdom. It was suggested by Dr. Rainolds of Oxford that such a version be prepared, based on the Bishop's Bible of 1568; it was thus connected, through Cranmer's, Matthew's, and Coverdale's versions, with that of Tyndale, so that it may be said to rest on that foundation.

"We never thought," said the translators, "that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one; but to make a good one better, or, out of many good ones, one principal good one, not to be excepted against."* Of this translation, little need be said. Though the Genevan version continued to be prized and used, this superior one soon succeeded in displacing it. Nearly all of those engaged in its preparation were university men, so that its scholarly character is of the first order, while its eminently English spirit has ever elicited the highest praise. As a version, it has had no superior in any language; of its literary and linguistic merits, Protestants and Romanists, Christian and unchristian alike speak.

The best example extant of Elizabethan English, it is more than remarkable that through the inevitable changes of such a composite language as the English, it has held its linguistic place as no secular work of that date has held it, and in so far as its English is concerned, has no approximate rival. Mr.

*Translator's Preface, King James' Version.

Froude is but one of millions as he speaks of "its peculiar genius and Saxon simplicity."*

"Who will say," writes Faber (*Dublin Review*, 1853), that the marvelous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the strongholds of heresy [Protestantism] in this country!" Romanists at the Reformation and since have been keen-sighted enough to see that the "heresy" of the Protestants is immediately imbedded in the English of the Protestant Bible. It is on this account that Pope Leo XIII. would close if he could, the evangelical schools and churches at Rome. It was in fact by reason of the increasing circulation of these Protestant Scriptures that Romish scholars deemed it necessary to prepare what is known as, the Rheims-Douay Version of 1582, "for the more speedy abolishing of a number of false and impious translations put forth by sundry sects."† It was not the Bible but the Bible in English that they desired to abolish.

The latest revision of the Scriptures (N. T. 1881, O. T. 1885) is based, as we know, on this Authorized Version of 1611, as this in turn looks back to Tyndale and back to Wiclif, so that it may be suffered to mark the highest result of scholarship and practical adaptation to popular needs. As to whether the English of this version is equal or superior to that of the preceding, is a question that may judiciously rest until the full revision has been longer before us. It is in point here to add, that even in this modern period the metrical renderings of Cædmon and Orm are continued in the paraphrases of Longfellow and of Coles.

In our discussion of the relations of the English Bible to the English language we are now at a point, where, in the light of the brief survey already made of the various vernacular versions, we may state a fact of prime importance, that the historical development of the English Bible as a book has been from the beginning substantially parallel with that of the English language. "The history of our Bible," as Dr. Westcott remarks, "is a type of the history of our church, and both histories have suffered the same fate."‡ So as to our Bible

* Froude's *History of England*, III., 84.

† Preface to Rhemish Text.

‡ Preface to Westcott's *History of the English Bible.*

and our speech. They have been historically correspondent. They have "suffered the same fate," prosperous and adverse, and this to such a marked degree that the record of the one is essentially embodied in that of the other.

"It is a noteworthy circumstance,"* writes Mr. Marsh, "in the history of the literature of Protestant countries, that in every one of them the creation or revival of a national literature has coincided with a translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, which has been remarkable, both as an accurate representative of the original text and as an exhibition of the best power of expression possessed by the language of that stage of its development." This closeness of progressive expansion is clearly seen in each of the three periods we have examined. Of the five or six most prominent authors of First English, nearly every one was more or less engaged in developing the language through its application to Scripture, while such a writer as Cynewulf, in his poem on Christ, verges as closely as possible on specific biblical paraphrase. The Saxon Bible was thus not only a church book for certain days and ceremonies, but was the book of the home, the school, and the shop, the people's hand-book of their vernacular.

So in the Middle English era on to the time of Elizabeth, Shoreham, Orm, and Hampole had done their initial work prior to Wielif, who, with his manuscript Bible containing over ninety-five per cent. of native English, did more to maintain and diffuse the language in its purity than all other agencies combined. "It is a version," says Shepherd, "entitled to special consideration in a history that treats of the origin and formation of the English tongue."†

After the invention of printing and the work of Caxton, the golden age of English versions began with Tyndale and others, reaching the high-water mark just at the time when the English language on its secular side was freeing itself from the fetters of the old inflectional system, and preparing for its great mission among the nations. The English Bible was there most opportunely to guide and measure that ever enlarging growth which it was assuming, and which, had it not been there, might

* Marsh's *English Lang. and Lit.*, p. 344.

† Shepherd's *History of the Eng. Lan.*, p. 84.

have become an Anglo-Latin dialect of the Romish church, or a confused compound of earlier and later English. So as to the modern period from the Genevan version to King James, when the work of bible translation seemed to rest conjointly with the establishment of the language substantially in its present standard forms. Whatever may be the differences of phraseology, idiom, and structure between what is known as Elizabethan English, and the English of to-day, it is conceded by all scholars that modern English as such began at that date, and was most purely expressed in the version of 1611. Not only did this version mark the highest point reached in the use of theological and religious English, but practically so in the use of common English. It expressed the sum total of those different elements of good that existed in the language as the result of its successive centuries of development, and added to them all the new element of Christian liberty. In the revision of the Scriptures now nearly completed, there is seen but another confirmation of the fact—that the growth of the Bible as a book is coterminous with that of the language. Though during the intervening two hundred and seventy years (1611-1881) this historical parallelism has been at times interrupted, as in the days of the Stuarts, still the correspondence has not been altogether lost, but providentially or otherwise, there has been a harmony of procession here quite without precedent in any other sphere. In fine, the necessities of a spoken language in constant process of change, demand such occasional revisions in order to keep abreast of the secular growth of the vernacular and to guard it. Hence it is, that the Scriptures are a philological factor in a language as no merely literary production can possibly be. Hence it is, that the English Bible in every new revision of it may be viewed as marking the limit up to which the language has come at the date of such revision. There is here, on the one hand, a convenient test of the purely philological progress of our language, and also a test of the success of those scholars who engage in the difficult and delicate work of scriptural revision. The language and the Bible act and react upon each other as great educational agents. Linguistically, they are the two great coöperative factors in modern progress. They cannot exist and act separately.

The English language is what it is, and will be what it will be mainly by reason of its vital relation to the English Scriptures.

It is now in place to call attention to some of those special forms of indebtedness under which the English language rests to the English Bible.

1. As to Diction and Vocabulary. What may be called the *verbal purity* of English, is founded on the vernacular bible as on nothing else. This is seen to be true in all the historical eras mentioned. It was so in the earliest days of the partial Saxon versions, when, for the very purpose of preserving the language from the corrupting influence of foreign tongues, the Scriptures were translated into it. It was this very object that Aelfric had in view when in the preparation of manuals for the schools he was especially careful to translate a portion of the Bible for daily use. In what are known as the Wicklif versions of Scripture, we are told "that they exerted a decided influence in developing that particular dialect of English—the East-midland—which became the literary form of the language; that they tended to prepare the way for Chaucer, who was personally indebted to these translations for much of the wealth and beauty of his diction."* When we come to the sixteenth century and to the practical completion of Bible versions in the seventeenth, this debt of our diction to our Bible is all the more striking. Elizabethan English, as a period of the language by itself, is enough to confirm this. It was right at the height and under the central influence of these versions that this form of English was developed. It was saturated with Bible teaching and spirit. Special emphasis is to be given to the fact that a distinctive religious diction was then established, from which no material departure has since been made. Whatever the changes in the strictly secular speech have been, this devotional phraseology then formed has remained substantially the same.

When it is remembered that the version of King James, as that of Tyndale, has, as a mere fact of numerical estimate, over ninety-five per cent. of native words, and that, as the Bible, it has a circulation accorded to no work of merely human origin, some idea may be formed of the indebtedness of our vocabulary

* Shepherd's *History of Eng. Lang.*, p. 85.

to this printed Word of God. Quite apart from that specially biblical phraseology which it has inwrought into the very heart of our common speech, there are a thousand forms of general influence which flow from it to purify the native tongue. The surpernatural character of our Bible aside, the English element in it is the best specimen extant of plain, idiomatic and trenchant English. Merely as a book among books, it has gathered up and embodied in its verbal forms more of the pith and marrow of the vernacular than any other book has done. Hence it is, that there is no other channel through which a natural English diction is to be so fully and safely perpetuated. Eliminate the Bible merely as a manual of verbal usage from the books that guide and govern us, and we remove at once the main safeguard of the purity and popularity of the language. Irrespective of the specifically moral aspects of the question, there is here a strong philological argument for the preservation of our Bible in its present position of authority among us.

2. As to Structure. George P. Marsh, in his admirable dissertations on our language, seems never weary of calling the attention of the student to this point and insisting upon its great importance in any comprehensive study either of the Scriptures or of the speech. After dwelling at length upon the grammatical framework of English, he devotes a separate chapter to the English Bible simply in its linguistic relations to the vernacular. The argument, of course, is, that the relation is such as to make the language a constant debtor. Here again, the progress of the language is coterminous with that of the versions of Scripture. In earliest English times under the old inflectional system, the structure was synthetic and inflexible. It was so both inside and outside of the Bible. In the transitional period under Wiclif and Tyndale, the inflections were breaking away, so that to whatever use the language was applied, there was greater pliancy of form and syntactical arrangement. There was a good degree of that flexibility belonging to a tongue analytic in its structure. When, in the time of King James, the inflectional system had wholly disappeared, the English Bible most decidedly of all books embodied and expressed that increasing freedom of adjustment which was the result of so great a linguistic change. The English of the Bible was now supple and elastic in a sense

unknown and impossible before. There was the utter absence of that rigidity which attends grammatical prescriptions. Bible English became, as Mr. White would say, "Grammarless English," in the sense that it was liberated from the bondage of formalism and traditional statutes. There are two special elements of structure which our Bible have confirmed in our language. They are simplicity and strength. Each of these may be said to have existed in marked degree from the very beginning of Bible versions in the days of Egbert and Bede. If First English is notable for anything of excellence, it is for the presence of clearness and vigor. Nothing in the line of connected human speech could be more direct and true than the original Saxon in which our ancestors wrote and into which they rendered the Scriptures from the Latin. The element of simplicity of structure may be said to be secured by the monosyllabic character of the earliest English. The verbal and syllabic brevity is noteworthy while the quality of strength is a necessary consequence of that old Teutonic vigor of spirit lying back of all external expression. Prominent, however, as these two phases of structure are in strictly secular English, they are still more marked in religious English, and, most of all, in the Bible versions. Bunyan and Baxter were more notable for these qualities than were such secular authors as Temple and Clarendon, but not so conspicuous for them as was King James' version. No English philologist studying the language from the scientific side only can possibly account for its marvelous possession of these qualities at the present day. Had it not been for the conservative influence of these successive versions, English would have been far more complex than it is and, to that degree, less forcible. In answering the question, as to what has been the main safeguard of the language at these points, the impartial mind must turn to the Scriptures in English. There is nothing inherent in the English speech fully to explain it. There is nothing inherent in the English people fully to account for it. No study of merely historical and philosophical phenomena will satisfy. These are but partial solutions. The great bulwark against ever increasing complexity from foreign influence has been the Bible, so that, at this day, more than fourteen centuries since the Saxons

landed in Britain, the speech maintains its substantial character and bids fair to do so in the future. It has lost little or nothing of value. This principle holds, to some extent, in the Bibles of all nations relative to their respective tongues. Most especially is this true of the Danes and Germans, but in no case as marked as in the English. Macaulay asserts, that had not the English been victorious at Crecy and Agincourt, they would have become a dependency of France. Had it not been for the English Bible, the simplicity and strength of our speech would have been excessively corrupted by foreign agencies, if not indeed, obliged to yield entirely to such agencies.

3. As to Spirit. There is an inner life within every language characteristic and active in proportion to the excellence of the language. This in English is potent and pervasive and is mainly of biblical origin. Says a modern author in speaking of the English Bible: "This for four hundred years has given the language, words, phrases, sentiments, figures and eloquence to all classes. It has been the source of the motives, acts, literature, and studies. It has filled the memory, stirred the feelings, and roused the ideas which are ruling the world."* Mr. Brookes, in his "Theology of the English Poets," has called attention to that distinctively moral element in our language which every deserving mind must have somewhat noticed. Its main source has been the English Scriptures pervading in their spirit every phase of English intellectual life. Writers have called attention to the ethics of our language and have done rightly in referring it mainly to the same source. We speak of the genius of our speech as Teutonic and Saxon. More than this, it is ethical and sober. It is not surprising that even so partial a critic of English as Mr. Taine is obliged to digress at frequent intervals along the line of his narrative to note this significant fact as to the scriptural spirit of our language. "I have before me," he says, "one of those old square folios [Tyndale.] Hence have sprung much of the English language and half of the English manners. To this day, the country is biblical. It was these big books which transformed Shakespeare's England. Never has a people been so deeply imbued by a *foreign* book; has let it penetrate so far into its manners and writings, its

* *Education*, May-June, 1882.

imaginations and its language."* This is a testimony from the side of French materialism as to the relation of the English Bible to the inner spirit of our language and nothing more could be desired. This influence is ingrained. It has so become a part of our vernacular that no line of demarcation can be safely drawn between the secular and the scriptural Enough has been said to show that the historical development of English speech has run parallel to that of our English Bible, that the language in its vocabulary, structure, and spirit is what it is in purity, simplicity, strength, and ethical character mainly because of its biblical basis and elements. Whatever our debt may be to our standard English writers or to the English Prayer-book of early Elizabethan days, our greatest indebtedness is to that long succession of English versions of God's Word which began with Bede and ends in Victorian days. We read in our studies as to the origin of language that some have traced it to the gods, regarding it as a divine gift or continuous miracle. The Brahmins so conceived it. Plato viewed it as inspired from above. At the other extreme, we are told that language is purely material and earthly; that it has no higher source than in the imitation of the cries of animals. Between these two extremes of superstition and infidelity, there lies the safeguard of language-origin in the divine-human element. It is the gift of God for man's development and use—a divine ability to be humanly applied. There is a spiritual element in all speech, rising in its expression, as man rises in the scale of moral being. It is one of the factors in Max Müller's large influence in modern philology that he has seen fit to assume this high ground. He goes so far as to say that the science of language is due to Christianity and that its most valuable materials in every age have been the translations of the Scriptures. It is at this point that the subject before us assumes new interest. Whatever the supernatural or spiritual element in any speech may be, it finds its best expression in the sacred books of that language. Whatever this element in English may be, its home is the English Bible, from which as a spiritual centre issue those influences which are to hold the language loyally to its high origin and to be a constant protest against undue secularization.

* Taine's *Eng. Literature*, p. 176.

The attitude of modern English philology to the Bible as an English-Language book must in all justice be a deferential one. The effort to reduce such a speech to a purely physiological basis so as to make its study merely that of the vocal organs, is as unscientific as it is immoral. In the face of the history of our Bible and our tongue, such a procedure must be condemned. Essential factors cannot thus be omitted. It has been the pleasant duty of such English scholars as Müller, Bosworth, Angus, and Marsh to emphasize this inter-dependence. It is a matter of no small moment that while in many of the schools of modern Europe, the current philosophy of materialism has succeeded in controlling the study of language, English philology is still studied by the great body of English scholars as biblical and ethical in its groundwork.

From this fruitful topic, as discussed, two or three suggestions of interest arise:

1. English and American literature, as they stand related to the English Bible, may justly be expected to be biblical in basis and spirit. The student who for the first time approaches these literatures, should approach them with such an expectation. Such an element is to be sought as naturally in English letters as its absence is to be anticipated in French and Spanish letters. English literature is written in a language saturated with Bible terms, Bible ideas and sentiments, and must partake of such characteristics. Nor are we to be disappointed. Despite the immoral excesses of the Restoration Period, and the skeptical teachings of later times, the underlying tone has been evangelic and healthful. No school of merely literary criticism, at the present day, can rationally ignore this element. Though we are told that literature "should teach nothing and believe in nothing,"* this book of books has been so impressed upon the national speech, and life, that when our writers have written they have voluntarily, or perforce, taught something and believed in something distinctively germane to morality. It is true that the language of our Bible is not meant to be, and is not the strictly literary language of English. It is a sacred dialect, covering an area of its own. Nevertheless, its literary influence is a potent one, so that no

* *Shakespeariana*, Feb., 1885.

writer, from Bacon to Carlyle, has failed to feel the force and restraint of it. The best of our authors have been the first to acknowledge and utilize it. It is only in the face of history, and with the same promise of failure, that some of our existing schools of letters are aiming to ignore it. He who now writes on "Literature and Dogma," must also write on—God and The Bible. They must be conjointly viewed by the English critic.

In a former article (*Pres. Rev.*, July, '81) we have shown the presence of this scriptural element in our earliest literature, from Bede to Bacon. "Shakespeare and the Bible," said Dr. Sharp, "have made me Archbishop of York."* Who can compute the influence of the English Bible of Elizabethan times upon England's greatest dramatist! A recent writer—in the nineteenth century—has written ably on the Bible and Elizabethan poets. In Shakespeare, most of all, is this influence visible. "He treats the Scriptures," says the writer, "as if they belonged to him. He is steeped in the language and spirit of the Bible."† All students of English are familiar with the results reached in this direction by Bishop Wordsworth, in his suggestive volume, *Shakespeare and The Bible*, where the contents of a separate treatise are required to contain the large variety of references which the illustrious poet makes to the English Bible. Dr. Wordsworth writes, of "more than five hundred and fifty biblical allusions, and not one of his thirty-seven plays is without a scriptural reference." It is, indeed, difficult to explain, in the light of such facts, how the poet's religious beliefs could have been any other than evangelical. A recent article (*Pres. Rev.*, July, '84) on the Religious Beliefs of Shakespeare fully substantiates this view. The dramatist's writings, containing as they do, eighty-five per cent. of English words, are a striking testimony to the influence of the Elizabethan versions. So, to a marked degree, this biblical bias of English authorship is noticeable all along the line of development, in prose and poetry; in fiction and journalism; in song and satire, there is this same pervading presence of the "big book" to which the cynical Frenchman refers. That vast body of distinctively religious literature

* *Education*, May, June, 1882.

† Quoted in *Shakespeariana*, Feb., 1885.

which is found in English in the form of sacred poetry and of moral and devotional treatises, is based directly on the English Bible, while in the broader domain of secular letters, from Spenser to Tennyson, English literary art has been purified and sweetened by the same holy influence.

2. The Common Speech of England and America may justly be expected to be of a comparatively high ethical and verbal order, to be pure and vigorous in proportion to the circulation of the Scriptures among the masses. There may be said to exist in these countries three distinct forms of the language, the biblical or religious, the literary and professional, and the popular. In the conjoint action of these forms, the literary will refine the popular just to the degree in which the standard authors become current and influential. In a still higher sense, it is the function and natural effect of the biblical to refine and strengthen popular English, and this it will do to the degree in which it has currency and acceptance. As Mr. Marsh has stated: "We have had from the very dawn of our literature a sacred and a profane dialect; the one native, idiomatic, and permanent; the other, composite, irregular, and conventional,"* to which, it may be added, that from the very beginning this sacred dialect has been more and more modifying the secular dialect, the folk speech, until among the middle classes of English-speaking countries its force is widely and deeply felt. No nation, Germany excepted, has felt such an uplifting influence more pervasively. It is a matter of no small moment and surprise that despite the large number of influences making directly toward the corruption of the common speech, popular English is as good as it is. Were it not for the counter agency of the lower forms of American and English journalism, it would be far better than it now is. Next to the influence of the English Bible on colloquial and industrial diction is that of the press. There is danger at times, lest the latter supersede the former. A more distinctive ethical element in modern journalism would be a blessing to the language, as well as to the morals of the people. The English of the Bible is not strictly the popular English of the shop and market and street, still its effect upon such uses of the language is so vital and

* *History of English Language.*

constant as to make it incumbent on every lover of the vernacular to bring the Bible to bear upon it in all its phases and functions. English philological societies could do no better work in behalf of the native tongue, in its general use, than to encourage the efforts of English Bible societies to scatter the Scriptures broadcast over the land. In America, especially, where by excessive immigration the Bibles of various languages are brought to counteract in a measure the influence of the English Bible, it is especially important that the Word of God in the vernacular should find a place in every household. If this be so, no serious alarm need be felt as to the purity and perpetuity of the common speech. The "profane dialect" would become scripturalized.

3. The Protestant pulpit of England and America may justly be expected to present an exceptionally high type of English speech and style. It is with this "big book," and with this "good book" that the clergy have specially to do in the secret meditations of the study and in the public administration of religion. By daily contact with it as a book, they would naturally become imbued with its teachings and spirit so as to avoid "big swelling words" in their preference for "great plainness of speech." In a sense applicable to no other class of men their professional and daily language should be conspicuously clean and clear, and cogent, because steeped in Bible influences. They may thus be presumed to be an accepted standard in the use of the vernacular to all other professions, and to the public to whom they minister. Certainly, no body of men are in a more favorable and responsible position relative to the use of their native tongue. Through the medium of their academic, collegiate, and theological training they have learned the distinctively literary use of English. By their official and personal relations to the public, they must perforce learn the language of every day life, while, in addition to all this, they enjoy the peculiar advantages arising from the ministry of that Word, whose sacred dialect becomes their common speech. The clerical profession, as any other technical profession—legal or medical—has a special vocabulary of its own, with this remarkable anomaly, however, that the Bible as the basis of that vocabulary has a larger element of idiomatic

language in it, and a more pronounced native character than the popular speech itself. Such a fact must be telling in its influence.

Nor is it aside from the truth to assert, that our Protestant English pulpit has, in the main, illustrated and is illustrating such an order of English. The list of English preachers from old Hugh Latimer on to Jeremy Taylor and Smith and Henry, and Robert Hall, and on to such American names as Mason, Nott, Summerfield, and Edwards would substantiate such an assertion. It is gratifying, both in a professional and philological point of view, to note that no better English is spoken or written at the present day than that in use by the educated clergy of England and America. In accounting for this result the English Bible may be assigned the first place. So potent, indeed, is this influence, that many an illiterate evangelist, with whom the only text-book is the Bible, has by the sheer education of the Bible itself as a book developed a plain, terse and copious vocabulary.

In every course of theological, literary, and linguistic study, as in every discussion of the popular speech, there should be included a thorough study of the Christian Scriptures in their manifold influence on the vernacular. The Bible is *the* book of all books.

The English Bible is *the* book of all English books. Whatever may be true of merely technical terms, the vernacular of the English peoples is the language whose best expression is found in the English Bible versions. The best elements of our literary and our daily diction are from this sacred source, and here, as nowhere else, lie the solid basis and the best guarantee of the permanence of historical English.

It is mainly by reason of the influence of this English Bible that the language which we love has become the accepted language, the world over, of modern progress, of Protestant Christianity, and of the rights of man.

T. W. Hunt.