

REVIEWS

THE BIBLE IN BASIC ENGLISH. Cambridge University Press; 12s6d. (library edition), 8s.6d. (school edition).

'The form in which the Bible is given here is not simply another example of the Bible story put into present-day English. The language used is Basic English.

Basic English, produced by Mr C. K. Ogden of the Orthological Institute, is a simple form of the English language which, with its 850 words, is able to give the sense of anything which may be said in English.

Working with the Orthological Institute, a committee under the direction of Professor S. H. Hooke, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Studies in the University of London, has been responsible for an English form of the Bible made from the Hebrew and the Greek.'

The above statement, itself written in Basic English, is taken from the 'Note' at the beginning of this Bible. For the purpose of this work the vocabulary of 850 words has been increased by 50 special Bible words and 100 words listed as giving most help in the reading of English verse, thus giving a total of 1,000 words. As is well known, Basic English is as often as not indistinguishable from ordinary everyday English, and indeed its very simplicity gives it a special power. Another note at the beginning of this book runs: 'When words are used which are not in the Basic list, they are printed in sloping print the first time they are used in any division of any book'. Such words are in practice equivalent to proper names, and are rare enough. The whole book of Amos only uses *cedar, oak, fig, olive, Pleiades, bear*. Micah uses *jackals, ostriches, fig*. And so forth, from which it is evident that the only extension of vocabulary that is necessary is in the direction of technical names for trees, animals and things like the obscure musical instruments in Daniel 3; and no one will grudge the Basic expert his inclusion of such words.

So much for the sheer technicalities of the medium, and we shall return to the suitability of the medium presently. But it must be emphasised that this new Bible is much more than a mere translation into a particular medium. It is at the same time an enterprising venture in rather a new direction, and there is much more in it than at first meets the eye.

For almost the first time we have an English text that makes frequent use, without a single blushing footnote or self-justificatory comment, or even of asterisks, etc. in the text, of the principal textual emendations, declarations of glosses or omissions of words or letters, which have come to be generally accepted among scholars during the past sixty or seventy years. It may indeed be said that by now textual criticism has reached a stage when the more arbi-

trary or outlandish alterations to the text, proposed by many of the critics at the end of the nineteenth century, have been generally abandoned, while the wiser suggestions made at that period and continuously to the present day have for the most part stood the test of time and are generally accepted, at any rate as hypotheses, there being quite often several alternative hypotheses for the restoration of a given text. The passage of years has produced a kind of consensus among exegetes in these matters, although of course there must still be considerable latitude to allow of differences of opinion about certain particularly difficult texts. Such a consensus of suggestions is reflected in, for instance, the critical notes in Kittel's Hebrew Bible and in the reliable modern commentaries. Yet there are few translations which reflect that same consensus: the Revised Version, for instance, sets out to translate at all costs the Hebrew text as it stands; the Catholic Versions except for the Westminster and the new American edition are concerned with a Vulgate text; the two aforesaid versions indeed take into account the accepted restorations of the text, but until now so little of the Old Testament has appeared. Both the Westminster and the new American text give indications and explanations when the text has been restored for purposes of translation. (All the above remarks are made with the Hebrew Old Testament in mind.)

This new edition in Basic English, however, follows quite plainly the general consensus of scholars on the restoration of the text. Being in Basic, it is written for the ordinary reader who is not concerned with how a reading is arrived at but who simply wants to know the probable meaning of an enigmatic passage. There are therefore no notes or explanations and the restored text is simply and plainly translated. One may, of course, take leave to differ on the interpretation or restoration of a given difficult passage, but it may confidently be said (as far as the present writer has had the opportunity of studying the Hebrew with this new text by his side) that any restorations of the text that are followed are in accordance with the general consensus and represent a moderate and reasonable opinion. In this way the Basic Old Testament has become an 'author' whose opinion about a given passage may profitably be consulted, and therefore it has also become a document of special value also to the scholar. The present writer has, for instance, taken pleasure in quoting this authority in the course of some recent work on the minor prophets. Quite apart therefore from the interest of its special diction, this edition is something of a departure. It should be noticed that certain siglas are in fact used in the text. Dots are used 'where it is no longer possible to be certain of the true sense of the Hebrew words, and for this reason no attempt has been made to put them into Basic': a prudent enough device. Square brackets are used when a passage is judged to be a gloss but is nevertheless included in the translation.

It would not be amiss, finally, to give a few examples.

Of plain narrative (I Samuel 18, 1-5):

Now after David's talk with Saul was ended, the soul of Jonathan was joined with the soul of David, and David became as dear to him as his very life. And that day Saul took David and would not let him go back to his father's house. Then Jonathan and David made an agreement together, because of Jonathan's love for David. And Jonathan took off the robe he had on and gave it to David, with all his military dress, even to his sword and his bow and the band round his body. And David went wherever Saul sent him, and did wisely: and Saul put him at the head of his men of war, and this was pleasing to all the people as well as to Saul's servants.

Of strong stuff from a prophet (Nahum 3, 1-4):

A curse is on the town of blood; it is full of deceit and violent acts; and there is no end to the taking of life. The noise of the whip, and the noise of thundering wheels; horses rushing and war-carriages jumping, horsemen driving forward, and the shining sword and the bright spear: and a great number of wounded, and masses of dead bodies: they are falling over the bodies of the dead: because of all the false ways of the loose woman, expert in attraction and wise in the secret arts, who takes nations in the net of her false ways, and families through her secret arts.

Of poetry (Psalm 130 *De profundis*):

Out of the deep I have sent up my cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, let my voice come before you: let your ears be awake to the voice of my prayer.

O Lord, if you took note of every sin, who would go free?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be feared.

I am waiting for the Lord, my soul is waiting for him, and my hope is in his word.

My soul is watching for the Lord more than those who are watching for the morning; yes, more than the watchers for the morning.

O Israel, have hope in the Lord; for with the Lord is mercy and full salvation.

And he will make Israel free from all his sins.

In this last example, as indeed also in the prose passages, each verse of the text begins a new line, that is to say, in this Bible a poetical passage does not receive special printing as of poetry, nor is prose printed continuously (as we did in the first two examples). The writer also took a liberty in the third verse of the *De profundis* by writing 'O Lord'. The Hebrew has the abbreviated form of the Holy Name here, and this is slavishly followed in the Basic with 'O Jah', which so seriously disfigures the English text that the writer altered it so as not to spoil the fine effect of the rest of the psalm.

In these examples it will be admitted that the rendering in Basic has an attractive straightforwardness in the prose passage, a power in the prophecy and a grace in the lyric poetry. The Basic prose is

indeed somewhat akin to the Hebrew, but in the prophecy we have an interesting performance because of course Nahum is not in the least Basic Hebrew. A comparison of these passages with the Hebrew or with a usual literal translation will repay study.

This edition is a complete Bible (without Apocrypha), but the New Testament had been issued separately in 1941.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

VADEMECUM THEOLOGIAE MORALIS. Dom M. Prummer, O.P. (Barcelona 1947; issued by B. Herder, London, W.C.; 10s.6d.)

Since its first appearance 28 years ago Fr Prummer's *Vademecum* has gone into six editions. Its modest aim is to serve as a clear and yet concise help to memory. Its format and remarkably full index ensure the one and its pocket-size is a sufficient guarantee of the other. This sixth edition must only serve to establish further its popularity as a valuable little reference book. The same edition has also been printed and published by Herder's in Freiburg (im-Breisgau).

INITIATION A ST JEAN DE LA CROIX. By François de Sainte Marie. PRESENCE A DIEU ET A SOI-MEME. By François de Sainte Marie.

(Series *La Vigne du Carmel*. Seuil; Paris.)

These two books are both new editions of extremely useful works. In particular we would recommend anyone who is anxious to become acquainted with St John of the Cross to read *Initiation* before attempting the Saint's own works. In English we have a translation of the competent introduction to the Mystical Doctor by Fr Gabriel; but this book will be found more suitable to the true beginner because it describes the system of poem and commentary as well as the relation of the doctrine to the Gospels and the general development of the life of the soul described by St John of the Cross. The other book is a helpful outline of the idea of 'presence' in regard to God and to self and the way these two must meet.

L'EXPERIENCE DE LA PRESENCE DE DIEU. By Frère Laurent de la Résurrection. Edited by François de Sainte Marie. (Series *La Vigne du Carmel*. Seuil; Paris.)

Brother Lawrence was a seventeenth century French Carmelite who reached a high degree of holiness and proficiency in the ways of the interior life. His doctrine is characterised, like his life, by a great simplicity truly fitting his Carmelite vocation. This volume reproduces the contemporary accounts of his life and teaching together with his 'Maxims' and Letters.

A SOUL OF SILENCE. By M.M. Am. du Coeur de Jesus, O.D.C. (Mercier Press; 2s.)

This little book concerns the spiritual background of silence which was one of the secrets of the sanctity of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity. It consists of the words and deeds of this holy Carmelite in so far as they were related to this great instrument of perfection, and it develops the theme from exterior silence to the more interior