

THE EDITOR'S TABLE.

Translating the Psalms.

THE Prayer Book translation of the Psalms has a special place in the affections of the English people. Technically, it is very far from being an ideal translation. Remembering its date and the limitations of its author, that is not surprising. Coverdale was unable to work from the Hebrew text; he translated from the Latin, which was a translation of the Greek Septuagint, which in turn was a translation from the Hebrew. The wonder is not that errors should creep in during this threefold process, but that they should not have been more serious and numerous than they are. Occasionally the English version is faulty, and at some points it is unintelligible. Once the translator of the Septuagint version, misled by his recollection of the Epistle to the Romans, inserted into a psalm St. Paul's quotations from other Psalms and Isaiah—a strange jumble reproduced by Coverdale, and still sung by the English Church as though it were part of the 14th Psalm. Indeed, English people are very trustful about the Psalter. Once a month they are content to affirm that the multitude of the mighty are scattered among the beasts of the people so that they humbly bring pieces of silver. To a cheerful chant, they affirm that we have heard of the same at Ephrata, and found it in the wood, and perhaps it would be unkind to enquire what precise significance they attach to those words.

On the other hand, they have an instinctive and most wise liking for the rhythm, the exquisite cadence, the innumerable verbal felicities of the Prayer Book Psalter. Its language has been familiar to them from very early years, and it was beloved by long generations of their forefathers. In 1662, indeed, such feelings were already so strong that the Caroline divines abstained from replacing the old translation by that of the Authorized Version of 1611. It may be said with some confidence that no new rendering, however scholarly and accurate, would be welcomed as a substitute for the familiar rendering in public worship. A more or less official attempt at a new translation for this purpose was made between 1913 and 1916, by a committee which Dr. Randall Davidson appointed. It was received with almost unanimous disfavour.

Many individual scholars have also tried their hands at new and more accurate translations of the Psalms. One, of very real beauty, was produced by Dr. Cheyne in 1885, before he had developed those eccentric ideas of Old Testament criticism with which later he became identified. It was a most charming volume, one of a series called "The Parchment Library." Three years later Dr. Cheyne produced a much larger work, with elaborate notes and a revised—and vastly inferior—translation. Another rendering was published in 1905 by Dr. W. F. Cobb, an accomplished Hebraist. Dr. Furneaux, sometime Dean of Winchester, brought out another in 1923. In the following year appeared Dr. Moffat's rendering of the Old Testament. And now Canon Dalton, that gallant veteran, has re-edited and republished in a separate form\* a version given ten years ago in his work on the Prayer Book.

It seems interesting to compare these efforts by taking one short Psalm in order to observe how the same original appears in the various new translations. Psalm 133, *Ecce, quam bonum*, will serve for the purpose. First, here is Dr. Cheyne's version of 1883:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
for brethren to dwell together  
kindly!  
Like the fine oil upon the head  
that runs down upon the beard,  
even Aaron's,  
that runs down upon the opening  
of his garments.  
Like the night-mist of Hermon that  
runs down  
upon the mountains of Zion;  
for there Jehovah commanded the  
blessing,  
even life for evermore.

The diction, into which no prosaic word intrudes, as well as the arrangement of the Psalm in stanzas, helps the reader

to understand that this is poetry. Next, Dr. Cobb:

Behold, how good and how pleasant  
it is  
For brethren to dwell together in  
unity!  
It is like the precious oil upon the  
head,  
That runs down upon the beard,  
Even Aaron's beard;  
That comes down to the skirts of his  
garments:  
As the dew of Hermon,  
That descended upon the mountains of  
Zion:  
For there JHVH commands the blessing,  
Life for evermore.

Rather less successful, perhaps. "Jehovah," despite its inaccuracy, is so firmly established in the English language that to boggle at its use seems pedantic. But even "Jahveh" is better than the mere row of consonants, which the inexperienced may read like a string of initials. Next let us have Dr. Furneaux, who heads the Psalm "The Blessedness of Brotherly Unity":

Behold how good and lovely a thing  
it is  
For brethren to dwell in unity.  
It is like the goodly oil upon the head,  
that ran  
down upon the beard, the beard of  
Aaron;  
Yea, that ran down upon the collar  
of his garment.  
It is like the dew of Hermon,  
That falleth on the hills of Zion.  
For there hath the Lord commanded  
the blessing,  
Life for evermore.

Simple and straightforward, though "ran down upon the collar" is rather unpleasant. Dr. Moffat introduces more changes than the others:

How rare and lovely it is,  
this fellowship of those who meet  
together!—  
sweet as the sacred oil poured on the  
head,  
that flows down Aaron's beard,  
down to the very collar of his robe;  
vital as dew of Hermon  
that falls on the hills of Zion.  
For in this fellowship has the Eternal  
fixed  
the blessing of an endless life.

That illustrates well Dr. Moffat's strong and weak points as a translator. His rendering, even if it be almost a paraphrase, of the last sentence gives it a clear meaning which it lacks in the other versions. On the other hand, his feeling for English diction is very imperfect, so that the charm of a passage often is hopelessly marred by the use of some unfit or journalistic word. Such a word in the above passage is "vital." "Vital issues" and the like belong to newspaper prose. It does not even express Dr. Moffat's meaning, which is not "vital" but "vitalising."

And now, for our last rendering, we turn to Canon Dalton's new book:

Behold, how good and how pleasant  
a thing it is: for brethren to dwell  
together in unity!  
It is like the savour of the sacred oil  
upon the head, coming down upon the  
beard: even Aaron's beard, that reached  
down unto the collar of his vesture.  
Like the dew of Hermon: that cometh  
down upon the hill of Zion.  
For there hath the Lord promised his  
blessing: even life for evermore.

Canon Dalton's aim clearly has been to make the least number of changes possible in the Prayer Book version. "Savour," however, introduces a new idea which is not in the original. Canon Dalton's admirable heading is "Diffusive influence of Union," and it is the diffusiveness of the sacred oil, not its fragrance, which the Psalmist has in view. The headings of the Psalms throughout this work are particularly felicitous. Another feature of it is that Canon Dalton has attempted to reproduce in English the alphabetical structure of the "acrostic" psalms. This seems hardly worth while; the acrostic device was merely used as an aid to memory, it is without bearing upon the meaning of a psalm, and its transference into English means some clumsy inversions and the repeated use of the same initial word. As a whole, however, this volume is among the most interesting of modern attempts at psalm-translation. Its use, not a substitute for but as an interpretation of the Prayer Book version, certainly would assist the average worshipper to "sing praises with understanding."

HOLY WEEK.—THE CHURCH  
TIMES will be published on  
THURSDAY next week.

REVIEWS.

DR. KIRK'S BAMPTON LECTURES.

*The Vision of God.* By K. E. Kirk, D.D. (Longmans, Green and Co., 25s.)

FOLLOWING some recent examples, Dr. Kirk has spent nearly three years since the delivery of his Bampton Lectures in completing the work for publication, and providing it with a fitting armoury of references and appendices. The delay is in some ways regrettable, but in the present instance has abundant justification, for the immensity of the subject cannot be adequately treated in eight addresses of a length suitable to public delivery, and if it is worth surveying at all, as it assuredly is, requires to be allowed the privilege of large-scale publication.

In the result, Dr. Kirk's survey of the Christian doctrine of the *Summum Bonum* makes a very big book, big in scope, handling, and judgment, as well as in erudition and mere bulk. It establishes him in a secure position amid the select and comparatively small company of outstanding living English theologians. His unique position as an Anglican writer on moral theology has brought him wide respect as a specialist; but, while certain to raise his reputation to a still higher elevation, his new book sets it also on a much broader foundation. This is not in the least a specialist's treatise, but a fully-documented challenge to every sincere and thoughtful Christian to consider what are in fact the object and meaning of Christian life.

As befits the treatment of a theme so vast and inclusive, Dr. Kirk embraces in his survey a wide field. He ranges through history, ethics, and Biblical theology with equal facility and sureness for the material with which to illustrate his points. But fascinating as are some of the by-ways into which he guides his reader, and illuminating as his constructive criticism always is when he pauses to assess the character of certain highly modern contributions to critical theology, yet the unity of his work is not impaired. The development of his argument unrolls with steady and consistent progress, so that one is never lost in a tangle of side issues, but remains gripped by a clear and firm exposition of the central theme. *Et par si muove*—the argument keeps moving, through every ramification of detail, until it emerges from the thicket every time with some definite addition gathered and stored.

Nor is the style in the very least either technical or abstruse. The book is a solid book, and full of matter; but it is one which anybody can read with as much pleasure as profit, given ordinary application. No one need feel deterred from tackling it by inexperience of the special sciences, or modest doubts about his claim to be abreast of modern physics and Biblical criticism. Nor does it carry its solid character sorrowfully. Without attempting the higher flights of rhetorical brilliance, Dr. Kirk makes himself easily comprehensible and at times amusing. Not only in the text, but sometimes in one of his valuable footnotes, he has the knack of exhibiting an adversary impaled upon an epigram, with truly devastating penetration. Consequently, though it can spare no room for padding and decoration, even such a full and copious work as this succeeds in holding the attention to the end. In fact, it is one of those very rare books on ethical subjects which demand to be finished in as few sittings as possible, and threaten the supremacy of the normal man's desire for food and sleep.

Its primary point is that the goal of Christian life is to "see God." The highest prerogative of a Christian, and his most characteristic activity, is worship. Nowhere else can he achieve complete disinterestedness. Christianity holds out the hope of rewards; but it is a moral commonplace that such rewards are only attainable by those who deliberately set themselves not to seek them. Again, Christianity makes supremely searching claims for moral obedience and conformity to an ideal standard of manhood; but the person who sets out merely to make himself morally good is after all still only concerned with himself. He has not yet succeeded in being other than self-centred. Dr. Kirk throws the whole weight of his advocacy into the effort to support the contentions of M. Henri Bremond, that prayer itself, if it is undertaken with the motive of self-training, is not genuinely prayer at all. Even here, in the last resort, all thought of self must be exorcised and cast out, that pure and disinterested worship may be offered to God. This is the only means to secure a clean and level foundation for human life either in its ascetical, its ethical, or its practical activity.

Historically, the desire to "see God" is older than Christianity. In different senses, or with different shades of emphasis, it is found both in the Old Testament and post-canonical Jewish circles, and also among the mystics and the philosophers of paganism. Christianity therefore offered the vision to a world which was already anxious and eager to attain to it. It is important to realize just how far and how fully the desire was experienced in the pre-Christian world, in order to judge of the manner in which the New Testament responds to the demand. And a good deal of patient analysis is required to form a just estimate of what the New Testament itself has to offer under this

head: in particular, the teaching of our Lord Himself presents a number of different strains, and it is easy, by leaping to over-hasty conclusions, to arrive at a very one-sided notion of His ethical demands. But at least it becomes plain that Christianity at its fountain-head transformed the selfish desire for religious experience into an ideal of disinterested worship and service.

The Church, however, is an institution, and as such is deeply concerned with practical methods. From the very first, it has had to deal with problems of three kinds: the systematization of moral principles, the exercise of corporate discipline, and the regulation of asceticism. No religious society can avoid handling any of the three sets of problems; it must have some sort of code of morals, and some system of spiritual government, and must adopt some attitude to the problem whether the world is to be renounced or embraced. The beginnings of the attempt to grapple with all three can be traced clearly enough in the New Testament; the greater part of Dr. Kirk's book is devoted to surveying the record of how at different periods the Church has continued to grapple with them, and to marking some of the notable turning points in the long history at which important successes have been gained in the process.

On the whole, Dr. Kirk finds a sane attitude maintained in the canonical writers towards all three sets of problems, owing to the lasting power of the Divine vision imparted by our Lord to His personal disciples. But after the New Testament period he detects an immediate collapse. The second-century Fathers are far too ready to substitute a Christian moral law for the Christian Gospel; discipline tended for centuries to be in its practical effects penal rather than pastoral and remedial; and great as was the achievement of the early monks in establishing the primary place of prayer in the Christian life, the eremitic and monastic movement, like that of the Gnostic theosophists and the heretical Montanists, sheltered many perverse and unnatural notions by which at times God might seem to have been excluded from His own world, and communion with Him appeared to be confined, in its highest forms at least, to extraordinary favours vouchsafed in vision and ecstasy.

It is quite impossible here even to sketch an outline of the subjects covered, let alone to make any detailed criticisms of the treatment. It might not be out of place to question whether the moralism of the second century is not over-stressed; but that the godly discipline of the primitive Church was monstrous, and that some of its asceticism was barbarous, admits of no dispute. Both penance and monasticism urgently needed reform, which, in time, came about. The latter need was largely met by St. Benedict, whose practical wisdom paved the way for the re-establishment of contact between the ascetic and the world; the severity of public discipline, although it never included public confession, but only public penance and reconciliation, tended to overthrow its own object, and as the system fell into disuse, its place was taken by the pre-eminently lay institution of private confession, which spread from the monasteries to the Church at large, and finally absorbed the sacramental character.

Meanwhile, theological influences were not wanting to mitigate the legalistic and rigorist conception of the Christian life. The last word yet remains, and will probably long remain, to be said upon the philosophical problems of grace and free will. But, at any rate, Dr. Kirk brings St. Augustine into line with his general scheme by showing how the great African Father, following Athanasius and the wisest of the monks, concentrated the attention on God rather than on human co-operation, and added a vital factor in that he thought of God in terms of love. It was left for St. Bernard to develop the intense concentration on the love of God as revealed in the humanity of His Son, which has ever since played such a fundamental part in Christian piety.

The course of subsequent development shows three peaks. St. Thomas Aquinas represents the principles of a "Christian naturalism" which is based on an exact study of phenomena, and accepts the world for what it is genuinely worth. He relegates abnormal spiritual experiences to the background, and, while insisting on the vision of God as being man's last end and full perfection, throws open the opportunity of contemplation to all men, and not merely to the monastic profession. Dr. Kirk obviously cherishes a warm devotion towards the Angelic Doctor, whose broad sanity did so much to straighten out the kinks of mediæval thought and mediæval assumption. Then comes St. Ignatius of Loyola and the *Spiritual Exercises*, to be later on so seriously misunderstood and abused. And finally, St. Francis de Sales simplified and adapted the principles of the *Exercises* for secular Christians, and so the gate to contemplation was thrown wide for the way-faring man to enter in.

The last lecture marks something of an anti-climax, not in interest, but in the subject itself. It shows how Protestantism has reverted to moralism, and Professor Heiler takes some shrewd knocks; but, following M. Bremond, it also shows the corresponding post-Tridentine reaction against mysticism in

\*The Psalms: A Suggested Revision of the Prayer Book Version. By J. N. Dalton, Canon of Windsor. (Cambridge University Press, 7s. 6d.)