

A Letter concerning Translations, and the Original.*

Dear Friend,—

I am thankful that you and I can praise God for the Scriptures in our own language. It is a great privilege. I can quite understand, too, that you were troubled when one whom you trusted made the suggestion that some verses, such as Exodus 12. 13,† Rom. 9. 3§ could be translated more helpfully. You felt in your heart, "How can I tell?" This concern is right, but a little prayerful thought will help as to this difficulty.

The Old Testament was written, mainly, in Hebrew, and all the New Testament in Greek. Now they have been translated into HUNDREDS of languages, and you rejoice in this. But it is plain that there could not be the "Original" in ALL these languages: so unless God "inspires" every translator, there must be always an appeal from every translation, for a final decision, to the precious words of the Original. This is important: otherwise we put MEN'S work on the level of GOD'S work, for men make these translations. I am thankful that many who have thus helped us have been godly and prayerful, and moreover, in answer to, the prayers of others of God's people (which we should not forget for translators of Scripture) we possess many

* I felt that this simple answer, to one who was perplexed, might help other children of God also. †§ Leaflet gladly sent.

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valuable and accurate versions. Further, I am convinced there has been God's overruling to PRESERVE from many erroneous renderings, but we must still go back to the original languages which God Himself gave, and say, "These are perfect, these are the touchstone."

The usual translation in English has been called the "authorised." It was made by committees, and issued in 1611, and "authorised" for use; and you will be glad to know it keeps largely to earlier translations, made by those who suffered for Christ's sake. So we have the joy of reading that which has become "our" translation, through the first labours of men who were willing to die in His loved service.

Again, one can truthfully say that there is no part of God's doctrine as to which you need be ignorant, or misled, through ignorance of Hebrew or Greek. So well is the work done. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit graciously guides the humble disciple (Ps. 25. 9) and I may add that this is more important than any of us realize. Greek and Hebrew knowledge, without the Spirit of God, has no spiritual fruit: but the guidance of the Holy Spirit will never tend to pride, or a habit of speaking against the use of Hebrew or Greek. God always creates lowliness: pride of ignorance is quite as bad as pride of knowledge, and we must remember that if no one had learned these languages we should have no translations. Nor can we forget that God was PLEASED to employ Hebrew and Greek, and it is irreverent to speak lightly of His choice and wisdom.

You may ask, "How can I find out the exact meaning?" If you CANNOT learn Hebrew or Greek personally, you need not be discouraged. Pray much: search your English Bible carefully: have a concordance in frequent use: and seek to obey God's will simply and promptly. Thus you will be much helped. You will find the "margin" of your Bible has some helpful alternative translations, especially those preceded by the letters Heb. or Gr. (meaning Hebrew or Greek). The ITALIC type, too, is a sign post: it indicates that the words thus printed are added to explain: but often the omission, though it does not help English idiom, will show the "heart-thought" of the Original (e.g. Ps. 2. 8, Matt. 16. 17, Heb. 2. 16). If it is possible to be gathered with a Scriptural assembly where some brethren are both gracious and instructed in the languages God used, you will find their aid a blessing. And our Heavenly Father meant His people to be channels of blessing in this way to one another, as "joints and bands" (Col. 2. 19). If you are far away, physically, you may be able to have correspondence with such children of God, and to ask any questions you have jotted down, when in doubt as to the interpretation. But do not live in a state of uncertainty: God has given you a valuable translation, thank Him for it, and feed on His messages daily. Improvements in translation rather bring out the FULNESS of the Original (which we expect in a work of God), than alter the signification of the usual version.

Yours in His loving kindness, PERCY W. HEWARD.