

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

A Masterful Appreciation by Chief Justice Walter Clark

The following address was delivered by Chief Justice Clark at the Church of the Good Shepherd, in Raleigh, on May 14, 1911, the occasion being the ter-centenary celebration of the Authorized version of the Bible. The editor of this paper stumbled upon it in a volume of the miscellaneous speeches and writings of the Chief Justice, and he immediately sought and obtained permission to reproduce it here. It is a gem that will delight every thoughtful reader and that should be studied and preserved in every household. The address follows:

"I appreciate the compliment of being asked to stand in this place and say a few words at the commemoration of the 300 anniversary of the Authorized Version of the Scripture. I deeply regret that what I shall say shall be so little worthy of the occasion and of the audience. The Post-Moralist has said that it is 'Greatly wise to hold converse with our past hours and ask them what they bore to heaven'. What is true of individuals in this respect is true of peoples and of nations. It is greatly wise for a people to hold in commemoration the anniversaries of the great events which have shaped their destinies and to take note whether they are keeping true the helm in the course which was laid down for us by our forefathers on those great occasions.

One of the most notable events in the history of the English-speaking race was when the Bible was given to the commonalty by the issuance of the authorized version in 1611. There have been few events which have had more marked effect upon shaping the subsequent career of all who speak the English tongue. This great work undertaken in 1604 and completed in 1611 came at a fortunate moment in the development of our language. It appeared at a time when Shakespeare was putting to press his immortal works and but a few years before Milton wrote. It appeared at a time when the language was in its happiest form and the Authorized Version fixed and congealed it like the breadth of a winter's wind passing over an arctic sea. It was Wordsworth who said,

"We must be free or die who speak the tongue
"That Shakespeare spake, the faith and morals hold
"Which Milton held."

With far more truth and force, this can be said of the Authorized Version of the Bible. A Roman Catholic of eminence, Father Faber, wrote with truth and beauty "Who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvelous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in the country? It lives on the ear like a music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells which the convert scarcely knows how he can forego. Its felicities seem often to be almost things rather than words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of the national seriousness. Nay, it is worshipped with a positive idolatry, in extenuation of whose fanaticism its intrinsic beauty pleads availingly with the scholar. The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped into its verses. It is the representative of a man's best moments. All that there has been about him of soft, and gentle and pure, and penitent, and good speaks to him forever out of his English Bible. It is his sacred thing, which doubt never dimmed and controversy never soiled; and in the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant with one spark of religiousness about him whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible.

In the long and splendid history of the Church of England and the Roll of its benefactions to the race it can count no single event of greater importance, none of more lasting benefit than when it gave to us the Authorized Version. That church has lost many of her children but they all took their mother's Bible with them. It has been a bond which has bound together the English speaking race. It has kept almost unchanged the language of the English-speaking world when in its most attractive form and has given us a book which is the common property of all Protestants of our race. Whatever religious difference there may be, whatever division about doctrines and forms and ceremonies, whatever diversities as to methods of church government, nay, whatever differences there may be about forms and methods of government or diversity of social conditions and ideals the English Bible issued in 1611 is a common standard received and acknowledged by all. It has preserved to us "The wealth and force of the Saxon tongue—our mother English in its simplicity and perfect beauty—the picturesque structure of an age now long gone by, already gray with an-

tiquity, in whose familiar forms of speech the voices of our forefathers and kindred linger, and the inspiration of the Almighty seems to speak as with the majesty of an original utterance—the English Bible has impressed itself with an almost overpowering authority upon the Christian heart of today, and is looked upon, in many cases as if it were the actual production of the ancient scribes, and its pages are read and pondered over as containing the ultimate and unalterable expression of divine truth.

The Authorized Version appeared at a most fortunate time not only because it caught the language at its most splendid and perfect stage of its development and congealed it, but historically it came from the press at a moment when the English people, overflowing their borders, were starting upon that era of world conquest whose impetus still abides with us. It was but four years after the founding of Jamestown and less than 10 before the landing at Plymouth—those two points from which the Anglo-Saxon has carried the Bible with him, as the shrine of his hopes, his Ark of the Covenant, while climbing mountains and crossing great waters, he has founded State after State and has not only reached the Pacific but in the far off continent of Australia and in New Zealand and in India has belted the world with his camp-fires, his language, his laws, and his religion.

Competent judges have said that the Prayer Book of the Church of England contains the most perfect English of any book that has ever been written. But that has not struck root in the great popular heart like this great Version of the Bible. The Prayer Book has remained the delight of the Church that gave it to the world, and of men of culture, but the King James Version of the Scriptures is the unquestioned property of every religious body in the Protestant faith that speaks our tongue. In the Authorized Version of the Bible the dominant individual force is that Tyndal whose translation, with its vigorous English, was its basis. The Prayer Book in its English Version dates much further back to the "Salisbury Use" of 1085, 20 years after the Conquest. It owes its beautiful rhythm and musical periods to the touch of Crammer whose soul like that of Elijah, went up to heaven in a garment of fire.

So completely have the words, the spirit and the turns of expression of the Authorized Version passed into the speech of men that it has become a part of the warp and woof of the everyday language of the people. Indeed to leave out the expression made by it familiar to us in everyday use would materially change our methods of thought and our manner of speech. It is related of one who heard a play of Shakespeare's for the first time that he said it was a very good play, but that half the things that were said were borrowed by the author for he had been hearing them all his life. That can be said with still more truth of the English Bible.

It is singular that tho for three centuries men have spoken of King James' Version as the Authorized Version, in fact while the King appointed the Commission, the translation they made was never authorized by King or Parliament or Convocation. Its authority has come from a far higher source, the hearts and minds of men and of all good people.

In this connection too it may not be amiss for me to say that in the days of our Saviour the only law in Palestine was the Levitical law and when the Scriptures mention that a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him" and again when He said "Woe unto you, ye lawyers" the Master had no reference to the Profession to which I have the honor to belong.

Under our form of government which strictly forbids the union of church and state and all interference by government with religious liberty or freedom of worship, it would be expected that the Authorized Version would make no impression upon our laws and institutions. But this is very far from the fact. No one can step into any Court from that of a Justice of the Peace to the Supreme Court at Washington or to the High Courts of Justice at Westminster without seeing our English Bible in daily and hourly use. No one can assume an office whether he is the King of England, or the constable of a township, without recourse to it. By it every witness makes an appeal to heaven of the truthfulness of his narration of past events and every public servant appeals to it as a pledge of the fidelity of his future conduct. The influence which has gone out from the sacred volume not only tinges but controls the legislation of the people who are familiar with its teachings. It has created an atmosphere which sur-

rounds and penetrates all legislation. It is invisible like the atmosphere that we breathe and like it is a part of our existence.

The New England Commonwealths, particularly Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, which were founded soon after the Authorized Version appeared, expressly enacted thru their law-making bodies that the "Word of God should be the foundation and supreme law of the Commonwealth." This has not been followed since, in express words, but the spirit and teachings of the English Bible have been the most potent power in shaping legislation.

I would not have time to state on this occasion the many evidences of the influence of the Scriptures in making and in the administration of law. One of the most marked is the effect upon our laws as to the status of women. Among barbarians woman was a captive in war and a slave. Among all Oriental people, except the Hebrews, polygamy existed and women were subject to purchase and lived in seclusion. Among the Anglo-Saxons from whom our laws are in main derived, women were chattels. What property they brought in marriage became the property of the husband and she herself was subject to chastisement at his will. Among the Hebrews alone was woman, in that distant age, the companion and the equal of man. The second chapter of Genesis gives the Hebrew conception of marriage. With the spread of the Hebrew ideals upon this subject by the diffusion of the English Version of the Scriptures, these views have gradually taken form in legislation. Wherever paganism dominated, woman was dishonored and marriage was a commercial partnership, at its best. Wherever the doctrine of the Scriptures has obtained, woman was glorified, and marriage was treated as a sacrament. She owes to the Scriptures and to the Scriptures alone, the position she holds today in the civilized world.

In the same way our ideas of divorce have been derived from the declarations of our savior. Among the Greeks and Romans, and indeed among all the nations of former times, divorce was at the will of the husband. As indeed it was in the old Testament. But under the new dispensation this was changed, and the latter view prevails more nearly in the countries that have the Bible than anywhere else.

Our systems of the judges riding in circuit comes from England where it is said to have been copied from the statement that Samuel "went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal and Mizpah and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah, for there was his house and there he judged Israel." The late Judge Brewer of the United States Supreme Court who visited Raleigh a few years ago well said "No nation is better than its sacred Book. In it are expressed its highest ideals of life, and no nation rises above those ideals. None has a sacred Book to be compared with ours. This American Nation from its first settlement at Jamestown to its present hour is based upon and permeated by the principles of the Bible. The more this Bible enters into our national life, the grander and purer and better will that life become."

The world has known no better code of laws than the ten commandments, from Sinia. The human brain has never conceived a code of Morality equal to the Sermon on the Mount. By the spread of the Protestant Scriptures among the masses, the innate beauty and force of these teachings have taken root and been expressed in statute by legislatures and in the decisions of the courts. The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man is gradually re-making the world. The statutes for the protection of children, the shortening of the hours of labor, for sanitation, improved dwellings for the poor, the care of those mentally or physically afflicted, the prevention of cruelty to animals and the steps being taken to procure treaties for the abolition of war are the most recent evidences of the influence of these Scriptures. Slowly but steadily the road is winding up the mountain. The leaven of the Scriptures will yet leaven the whole measure of legislature. Indeed the Scriptures might well be called the Magna Carta of the poor and of the oppressed.

The late Professor Huxley, agnostic tho he was, said, "Down to modern times no State has had a Constitution in which the interests of the people are so largely taken into account, in which the duties, so much more than the privileges, of rulers are insisted on, as that drawn up for Israel. No where else is the fundamental truth that the welfare of the State in the long run, depends upon the welfare of the citizen, so strongly laid down." The cardinal idea of the Scriptures that between the humblest individual and the great God himself there is no mediator save His Son, gave a dignity to manhood and the thought that in his sight rich and poor, bond and free are equal, teaches absolute equality among men. Not only is the true but while all other governments of

the East were absolute despotisms in which the people existed only for the glory and the profit of the rulers, in Israel alone, the form of government which God ordained for his chosen people was a republic. In their theology, they held as King an invisible God, but in actual practice their rulers were chosen by the people themselves. It was the wise suggestion of Jethro to Moses at Sinia that to relieve himself of his responsibilities, he should "Provide out of all people, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens." In carrying out this suggestion, Moses, as you will remember, required the people to elect these rulers themselves, saying "take you wise men, and understanding, and known, according to your tribes, and make them heads over you." Thus more than a thousand years before Plato dreamed of his ideal republic, there was laid down the principle of representative and elective government. "Take you" that is "elect", "out of all the people," that is in "civil equality," and at the same time Moses gave them a body of statutes, a written Constitution to which the people gave their public assent.

The Hebrew commonwealth was the first established without any monarchy, the first to have a popular legislative assembly, the first to ask for the judgment of the people by a Referendum, in a general election. The first to organize government in three departments—legislative, judicial, and executive—the first to prohibit caste or class distinction, the first without any aristocracy or nobility and the first to make any provision for popular instruction.

It is no wonder that immediately following the wide distribution of the scriptures, in the popular tongue, the movement for popular government took root and that it has constantly spread from that day to this. From that impulse the Republic under Cromwell came but a few years afterwards and tho it was temporarily overturned under Charles II, England practically became a republic in 1688 and has become more so each succeeding year. The Puritans in Scotland and those who landed on the shores of this country were thoroly imbued with these ideas from the dissemination of the scriptures, and they have been perpetuated in the laws, the institutions and constitutions of the States which have been founded here.

Algernon Sydney who gave his life on the scaffold for the doctrine that a people had a right to depose an unworthy sovereign, which was the imperative Recall, and whose name is preserved with that of the illustrious Hampden in the title of a college in our sister state, says that the Hebrew Commonwealth, besides the magistrates of the tribes and cities had for officers (1) The chief magistrate who was called a judge, (2) A council composed of elders, (3) The great congregation or general assembly which expressed the popular will. These were the prototypes which have been copied in our constitutions which prescribe a President or Governor, a Senate and House of Representatives. When the Israelites in their folly, insisted on having a king like the neighboring nations, God was sorely displeased. Tho He Himself selected the earlier kings, the history of Israel under its kings was a history of decadence and disaster. These things did not pass unnoticed by the sturdy men who remade the English constitution and who founded the American Commonwealths.

In closing, this paper upon the influence of the Protestant Bible, upon the laws and institutions of the people into whose tongue it was translated, I cannot refrain from quoting as further proof of our indebtedness to it for those republican ideas which have so profoundly influenced the history of America, the following words from Governor Vance upon the subject. Said he, "Their organic law containing the elements of their polity, tho given by God himself was yet required to be solemnly ratified by the whole people. This was done on Ebal and Gerizim and is perhaps the first, as it is certainly the grandest, constitutional convention ever held among men. On these two lofty mountains, separated by deep and narrow ravines, all Israel, comprising three millions of souls were assembled; elders, prophets, priests, women and children, and 600,000 warriors, led by the spears of Judea and supported by the archers of Benjamin. In this mighty presence, surrounded by the grand accessories of the scene, the law was read by the Levites, line by line, item by item while the tribes on either height, signified their acceptance thereof by responsive Amens. Of all the great principles established for the happiness and good government of our race and approved by the centuries of trial no one had a grander origin, or a more glorious exemption than this one, that all governments derived their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The government thus established by the Almighty Himself was not only a republic but a federal republic like our own. It may be a mere co-

incidence that like ours, and like the Dutch Republic that maintained liberty against Alva, it consisted of thirteen states. It may, or may not be, a mere coincidence in the light of current and coming events which are "casting their shadows before" that in that great constitutional convention in the valley between Ebal and Gerizim, the women had equal voice with the men. We know this that soon after, when Israel was sore oppressed beneath the heel of the stranger, Deborah arose a judge over Israel and drove out the oppressor.

And finally brethren—I think that I have heard that expression somewhere—I will leave with you the

opinion of two of the world's greatest men as to the influence of the Protestant Bible of 1611, while it was yet new:

Said Francis, Lord Bacon: "There was never found in any age of the world, either religion or law, that did so highly exalt the public good as the Bible."

And John Milton, the author of "Paradise Lost", wrote: "There are no songs comparable to the Songs of Zion, no orations equal to those of the prophets and no politics like those which the scriptures teach."

We do well to honor this anniversary of the year that gave it to the world in our English tongue.

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