

were replaced by pragmatism, and faithfulness by expediency' (291). Accordingly, he is keen to finger perceived unfaithfulness to the founding biblical and confessional principles of the Free Church. In particular, he singles out for criticism A. B. Davidson and William Robertson Smith on biblical inspiration and authority; the decline of exclusive psalmody, the church union movement; and Robert Rainy and the 1892 Declaratory Act. (Rainy, interestingly, was included in *Disruption Worthies!*) Quite apart from Finlayson's personal theological convictions, what is unconvincing about this course of argument is that his own selection of Disruption 'worthies' resists his polemic. For example, Robert Candlish and Alexander Duff were enthusiastically pro-union, and Duff even came down on Robertson Smith's side during the protracted heresy hearings. Andrew Bonar, despite opposing union with the United Presbyterians, seemed to value evangelical orthodoxy over confessional orthodoxy – a position many scholars would interpret as consistent with his mentor, Chalmers. So it would seem that within the unity of the Free Church founders was more theological diversity than Finlayson cares to admit! His (at times) rather overbearing attempt to prove the opposite should hopefully not detract from what is a very useful and engaging book.

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The King James Bible After Four Hundred Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences, edited by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 378, ISBN 978-0521768276. £25.00

The flurry of publishing which has greeted the 400th anniversary of the 'King James Bible' (KJB) has resulted in an embarrassment of riches, to the point that a full reading around the subject matter would involve a significant investment of time. For those who are limited in that

respect, Cambridge University Press is to be commended for bringing together a variety of pertinent essays in a single handsome volume.

The King James Bible After Four Hundred Years, edited and introduced by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, consists of fifteen essays by a range of contributors. These essays vary in their accessibility to the general reader, but they are uniformly of a high quality. The editors have grouped them into three unevenly-sized parts: Part I concerns “The Language of the King James Bible”; the slightly larger Part II moves onto “The History of the King James Bible”; while Part III, by far the largest section, is concerned with “Literature and the King James Bible”. However, as we shall see, these categories are not quite as hard and fast as their titles suggest.

The editors and the majority of the contributors teach at American universities, although a sizeable minority are European-based. There is little harm in the resultant bias, which does make itself felt: on the contrary, the American perspective provides a nice counterpoint to the patriotic rhapsodising of much British popular literature on the topic. Indeed, the first essay, “Language Within Language” by Stephen Prickett, deconstructs this post-Romantic ‘flood of superlatives’ (27), and shows how the rise in the appreciation of the KJB as ‘literature’ is related directly to the decline in its actual authority. Although itself sometimes verging on the fanciful, this essay returns us to the original and pragmatic task of the translation committee, and provides an entertaining and well-illustrated account of the political considerations underpinning its decisions.

By contrast, the second essay in Part I is a rather dry examination by Robert Alter of the translation of *Ecclesiastes*. Indeed, Prickett’s contribution relates far better to essay no. 7, which is the last essay under the category “History”. This is one example of where editorial decisions have not entirely worked. Under the title “From Monarchy to Democracy: The Dethroning of the King James Bible in the United States”, Paul Gutjahr considers the explosion of new Bible translations since the Revised Version in 1881. This chapter is of particular value for any person or church considering the purchase of a new Bible, providing as it does a concise summary of the theological aims and translation theories of the most popular modern versions.

The placement of this particular essay at the end of Part II is

meant to indicate that the history of the KJB has been brought up to date. The first two essays concern its ‘pre-history’: the first has a very specialized interest in the printed Bible as artefact, while the second gives a more comprehensive account of the life and influence of William Tyndale. However, the three essays which follow give the impression of a very random selection of *foci* from a four-hundred-year reception history. Isabel River’s account of Philip Doddridge’s annotations may be fascinating to the historian, but is of little interest to the non-specialist; and then the section takes a massive, dislocating leap into the modern and political with R. S. Sugirtharajah’s excellent “Postcolonial Notes on the King James Bible”. All in all, despite the high quality of individual contributions, the organisation of Part II comes across as somewhat random.

Sugirtharajah’s essay is deserving of further attention, for it takes to task recent books on the KJB by the likes of Alister McGrath (2001), Adam Nicolson (2003), and Melvyn Bragg (2006). When such writers praise the KJB for its literary merit, Sugirtharajah claims that the underlying narrative is the ‘appropriation’ of the texts of another culture to prop up English superiority. Moreover, the ‘coloniser’ of the biblical texts then seeks to denigrate the originals: Sugirtharajah cites Nicolson’s disparaging remarks about the ‘despicable’ scholarship of the Gospel writers, and his contrasting elevation to almost mythical status of the genius of the King James translators (149–51). The implication is that the English language and culture itself has defined true religiosity by rendering the coarse language of foreigners into fine, authoritative English prose. It is a warning worth heeding before we elevate the KJB to too high a status in our churches.

In some ways, the third part of this book is the most interesting. It is the largest section, containing eight essays – more than half the total – and although its focus is on literary works, it functions also as a history of ideas and identities. The reader’s interest in the respective chapters may depend to some extent on the degree of their familiarity with particular literary texts; but the real fascination is in the whole sweep of these latter chapters, as the KJB is traced almost as a recurring character through the history of modern literature.

After the initial highly technical analysis of Milton, the narrative becomes more entertaining with Hannibal Hamlin’s very readable

depiction of John Bunyan and his relationship with the biblical text as an almost physical entity. The following two essays take us through Romantic and Victorian developments respectively. Then James Wood guides us into the twentieth century with an account of the subtle use of biblical language in *To the Lighthouse*, where Virginia Woolf's delicate allusions form 'the great farewell [...] to the last, frail sureties of Victorian Christianity' (284). This theme is echoed in the following chapter by Norman W. Jones, where, in *Absalom, Absalom! and Beloved*, the KJB 'has itself, as a text, become for some modern readers a kind of ghost' (271).

However, reports of the death of the KJB were premature. The last two chapters illustrate that its literary, religious, and colonial legacy is still alive and sometimes kicking. Katherine Clay Bassard writes movingly about "The King James Bible and African American Literature", where she describes in historical context the problems inherent in reading the 'master's' book for an anti-slavery message. This is a chapter worth reading before pronouncing too blithely on the Bible as a 'tool' for liberation: as Bassard observes, there is something highly problematic about 'the attempt to dismantle the master's house using the master's tools' (300). The final essay explores a similar theme: Heather Walton points out that whenever women engage with the Bible, they are simultaneously engaging with a dominant patriarchal interpretative tradition, in which even a 're-reading' has the effect of 'inevitably reinscrib[ing] its power'(310).

Any book with such a wide remit will always be deficient in some areas. The American slant, which mostly serves the book well, is perhaps also responsible for the rather flattened view of 'English' history and language. Significantly lacking is any account of the role the Church of Scotland played in the production of the KJB; and an even more serious lacuna is the absence of any consideration of the 'fixing' of the English language and the effect on the languages of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Nevertheless, this book can be recommended as a challenging and entertaining read, and as a very suitable summation of this anniversary year.

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