

# Another Literary Venture—Anthony Purver's Translation of the Bible, 1764

ANTHONY PURVER

**A**NTHONY PURVER was born at Hurstbourne, Hampshire, in 1702. At school he gave early proof of extraordinary genius. His memory was remarkably vigorous ; he could commit to memory six chapters of the Scriptures in one hour. He read much. He was apprenticed to a shoemaker, who, like the master of George Fox, employed his apprentice in keeping sheep. His attention was turned to Bible translation through meeting with a Quaker book, *Rusticus ad Academicos*, written by Samuel Fisher, in 1660, in which some inaccuracies in the translation of the Bible were noted. He acquired the knowledge of Hebrew with the aid of a Jew. After keeping school for a short time in his native county, he found his way to London and to the Friends' meeting-house at the Bull and Mouth, where he was convinced of Friends' principles, and in the space of one month's time he appeared in the same meeting-house as a preacher. In 1727 he returned to his home town and re-opened a school. About 1733 he began the translation of the Old Testament, and also the study of medicine and botany.

At the house of Josiah Butcher, of Hambrook, near Bristol, Purver met Rachel Cotterell, who, with a sister, was conducting a boarding school for girls at Frenchay ; they married in 1738. A school for boys was opened at Frenchay, where Purver was visited, on April 24th, 1739, by John Wesley, who wrote in his Journal : " I dined at French Hay, about four miles from Bristol, at Anthony Purver's, one of much experience in the ways of God." John Churchman, a Minister from America, called upon him in 1750. Later he removed to Fishponds, near Bristol, and in 1758 he was living in Andover, in Hampshire. His family consisted of a son, Anthony, who died in infancy, and a daughter, Hannah,

who married Isaac Bell, of London, in 1762. Hannah lived not long, and her son, John Purver Bell, was brought up by his grandfather at Andover. Anthony Purver died in 1777, and his remains were deposited in the burial ground of Friends at Andover.

### HIS BIBLE

About 1741 two or three portions of the revised Bible were published in Bristol by Felix Farley, but failed to attract notice, although written of by Dr. John Fothergill, the noted Quaker physician, of London, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1746. In 1764, after the labour of thirty years, Purver

completed his grand work, a translation of all the books of the Old and New Testaments from their original tongues, a performance never accomplished by any one man before (*Friends' Monthly Magazine*, vol. 2 (1831), pp. 49-52).

One of his pupils, John Player, of Thornbury, tells us :

It was not unfrequent for him when he met with a subject which the translators found difficult to reconcile to the context, and which seemed in the common translation contradictory, to retire alone into a room and there wait for Him who had the key of David to unlock the mystery . . . sometimes sitting alone for two or three days and nights waiting for the divine opening of the mystery.

Dr. Fothergill, learning that Purver was at a loss to find a printer willing to take up his work, purchased the copyright of the manuscript for one thousand pounds and had it printed at his own expense, with the title: *A New and Literal Translation of all the Books of the Old and New Testament; with Notes Critical and Explanatory*, by Anthony Purver. It was issued in two volumes, large folio, in 1764, printed by the well-known firm of W[illiam] Richardson and Samuel Clark, and sold by William Johnston in Ludgate Street, at the price of four guineas. The first volume closes with the book of Psalms, and contains xxxviii + 745 pages, and the second volume has viii. + 334 + 339 pages. The sub-headings have "Notes upon the Bible, Critical and Explanatory, &c." and each left-hand page has the heading "Notes upon," although the text occupies, on an average, two-thirds of the page. The amount of reference in the Notes to authorities ancient and modern is amazing. "He

has taken very considerable pains with the scriptural chronology, and furnishes his reader with a variety of chronological tables." Information as to the success or otherwise of the good doctor's handling of the Bible is largely absent. We would fain know more, but we are told that he gave away many copies to his friends on both sides of the Atlantic.

Dr. Hingston Fox, in his life of Dr. Fothergill, writes of the Purver Bible :

In his translation he tried to keep close to the text, but to give the sense in plain modern speech, pleading that the Scriptures needed fresh rendering from time to time in the growing living language of man [thus anticipating, by many years, the work of Weymouth, Lloyd, and Moffatt]. His lack of literary training rendered his style uncouth, so that his sentences ran uneasily with little euphony or poetic rhythm.

Another writer states :

It is inelegant but faithful and furnished with a great quantity of original notes and tabular elucidations ; it has probably supplied unacknowledged help on many difficult passages to more noted commentators (Wood, *Social Hours with Friends*, New York, 1867).

Few hints of the reception into Friends' libraries of this " Quaker Bible " are at hand. Abiah Darby, of Coalbrookdale, Salop, wrote in her Diary :

1766. v mo. Had company—two of them parsons with whom I had conversation on many subjects. I particularly asked them their sentiments on Purvers translation of the Bible, of which they spoke well. I pointed out several important alterations from the common translation, which was rendered from the original—as the Baptizing *into* the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, &c. (MS. in D).

In the preliminary pages to volume one we read under the heading : Premonition :

A judicious person who is acquainted with Printing, on knowing the Difficulties and Inconveniences which attended the Publication of this Work, and that the Author was all the Time at a Distance from the Press, might rather wonder there are no more Errors of all the following kinds, than that he is presented with such a List.

And at the close of the list of hundreds of errors we read :

Some more but trivial Errors are omitted, and some perhaps overlooked ; and as large as the list may seem, yet it might cease to appear so, if compared with the Errata occasionally collected from other Bibles, but without any Design of publishing them. I have purposely taken Notice of our own Mistakes, being unwilling to conceal Things of this Nature from the Publick.

A few translations may be given, taken at random : Eccles. xi. 1, " Cast thy Bread atop of the Water," reminding us of the word " atop " frequently used by George Fox. [*Bread* is printed *Breast* and corrected among Errata.] Matt. v. 22, " But I tell you, that every one who is angry with his Brother without cause, shall be obnoxious to the Judgment ; whoever says to him, Blockhead, shall be obnoxious to the Council, and whoever says, wicked Fool, be obnoxious to the Punishment of Fire." Acts xxi. 15, " Taking up the *Baggage*," as R.V. Rom. xi. 1, " *Far be it . . . Abraham's Offspring.*" Phil. iii. 21, " *mean Body.*" The first note to Daniel reads : " Our last *Translators* have here *The Book of*, but not to the following Prophets, for no Reason that I know of, but because they are less ; and *the Prophet* to the foregoing, as being bigger ; if such are any Reasons." The reference is to the A.V. ; the R.V. follows A.V., but the American Standard Version follows Purver. There is quite a homily on the bringing up of children, in a note to Gen. xxxiv. 1, in which he refers to Tyndal's *Obedience of a Christian Man* " (a Book well worthy to be reprinted)." Of the " *little Lads* " of 2 Kings ii. 23, who scoffed : " Get thee up, *Bald-pate*," Purver has this note : " Who might be great Boys, and scoff at *Elisha* wickedly because he was a Prophet ; besides they might not be killed, which if they had, we might expect it to be said so, and are not to feign things, and then reflect on them ; on the contrary so many being torn, and by that only being said none killed, may seem occasioned by their fighting with the Bears. However it was not the Prophet killed them, nor made the Bears do it." John xxi. 15, " Jesus asks Simon Peter, Simon of Jonas, dost thou love me more than these *do* ? He says to him, Yes, Lord." The note on the added word *do* reads : " Ver. 15, *do*] for otherwise might be understood, more than *thou dost* these. *Whitby* indeed interprets *these* to be the *Nets and Fisher-boats* ; which makes the Comparison much lower and wider, than if it was spoken of *Peter's* loving the other disciples, nay so wide one may think as not to admit of a Question . . ." There is a naïve remark in the concluding note to the Psalms : " I conclude this *Book* with my Remarks, that I found the following *Psalms*, by reason of their Sublimity, difficult to translate, viz. liii, lviii, lxxiii, lxxiv, lxxvi, lxxxiv,

lxxxvii, xc, xcv, cx, cxxxix, cxl, cxli ; and so in a less degree, the iv, x, xxii, lxxv, xciii, cvii ; but the xlvi, lxvii, xcvi, xcvi, xcvi, xcix, c, cxxxvi, and cxlv, plain and easy."

We are indebted for some of these allusions to an article by Ernest E. Taylor in the *Kendal Mercury and Times*, Jan. 8th, 1909.

## Anecdotes of Elizabeth Fry

" Elizabeth Fry took a great interest in my grandmother and her children. Calling one day, she saw my father, Frederic Taylor, aged about five, sitting on a little stool. She asked him if he knew any verses, and his mother told him to repeat something. He started on a canto of *Paradise Lost*, and went on and on till E. Fry exclaimed in amazement :

" ' My dear Elizabeth, pray stop the poor child. I fear for his brain.'

" Soon after, calling again, E. Fry said :

" ' And where is thy poor little son who repeats so many verses ?'

" Grandmother : ' I think he is in the garden burying a beetle.'

" E. Fry : ' Let us go out and join him.'

" So they went and E. Fry acted as chief mourner and stood at the head of the minute grave, while the beetle, laid in a cardboard box, was duly interred."—MARY J. TAYLOR, Hove, 1926.

## Peregrine Musgrave

The Musgrave Family, with a sketch of the life of Peregrine Musgrave (1643-1712). He was the elder son of Ernestus and Deborah (Gwin) Musgrave, of the Welsh county of Cardigan. *Piety Promoted* states that Peregrine " was by trade a clothier, of good repute amongst men, and the Lord endowed him with wisdom and understanding, whereby he was serviceable in the Church, especially in meetings for business and the care of the poor." He married Alice Lewis, daughter of Lewis David, of Llanddewi Velfri, in 1674, at Redstone, Pembrokeshire. He was a clothier of Haverfordwest. He had four children, of whom Deborah (b. 1676), married, 1692/3, Bethell Weston. See Besse's *Sufferings* ; *Jnl. F.H.S.* vi.

As a specimen of the thought and teaching of the times, Joseph Gurney Bevan stated in Y.M. 1805 : " Friends, the way is narrow ; contraction not expansion is the watchword."