

LETTER 7
1972

MODERN ENGLISH VERSIONS

Your question about the best version to make available for Indian students is not an easy one. We who were brought up on the King James Version tend to feel that its language is perfectly intelligible. Yet a few years ago I thought I would enjoy reading the *Essays of Montaigne* and purchased a copy. I found that the Preface stated that the translation by Florio (made at about the same time as the King James" Version) preserves the flavor of Montaigne better than any subsequent translation, and therefore would be the translation used in this edition, even though its language is somewhat archaic. I began to read it and soon found myself bogged down with so many unfamiliar words that my interest lagged and I never did read more than a small part of the book. I fear that this is the experience of many Americans when they undertake to read the King James Version. It was a most excellent translation in the English language as it was spoken several hundred years ago, but the language has greatly changed since that time, and it must be even more difficult for Indian students who have learned contemporary English, since so many of its verb forms and word usages are those of a bygone day.

Most scholars believe that in the course of the years copyists introduced minor errors, since it is impossible to copy a book of any length by hand without some mistakes creeping in. In some cases they believe that a copyist put a note in the margin indicating his interpretation of a passage, and then a later copyist thought these marginal notes to be part of the text, so that manuscripts from later centuries include quite a number of words that were not in the manuscripts of the early centuries.

About a century ago two great English scholars named Westcott and Hort advanced a theory that would discard every thing that is not found in the two earliest manuscripts that we possess. Their theory doubtless went too far, for there were probably some omissions and some mistakes in those two early manuscripts. Most scholars today think that the truth is somewhere