

## The B.M.S. and Bible Translation.<sup>1</sup>

THE 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society is to be celebrated in 1942. But March 24th of the present year is the Centenary of the Bible Translation Society, which has been through these hundred years a vitally important auxiliary of the parent organisation.

The object of the present writer is to review the achievements of the missionaries of the B.M.S. in the translation and the printing of the holy Scriptures both in the half-century before the founding of the B.T.S., and in the century that has since passed.

Nothing is more fundamental to the world enterprise of Missions than the conquest of Babel and the use of the modern counterpart of the Pentecostal blessing, the divine gift of tongues, through which the message of Christ's redemption can be translated into the speech of all the nations and tribes of the world. If the resources of the Church of Christ should at any time and by any means be restricted, there are some indispensable things which should at all costs be maintained and pressed forward, in order that the gospel may continue to spread abroad and that the younger churches that are entering into the great Christian family may be living and growing witnesses to the truth of Christ. Can there be any question that first among these indispensable things is the full and faithful translation of the Bible into every language in which men learn to pray to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? The Old Testament writings preserved for centuries the revelations of God to the people of Israel, and before the coming of Christ they had, both in Hebrew and in translations, done much to prepare the way of the Lord, even among the Gentiles. And in the Christian era the Bible has been the greatest of all missionaries, penetrating where preachers could not enter and remaining to shed abroad and to preserve the truth. Nothing has been more marvellous in the history of the last century-and-a-half than the progress that has been made in Bible translation. To British Baptists has been granted by God a place of honour and leadership in this service.

All the Protestant Churches of the world rejoice in the fruits

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Kilgour's Survey just published, *The Bible throughout the World*, has been of great service in the preparation of this article, and the writer is very grateful.

of the work of the great Bible Societies, which since 1804 have made the publication and circulation of the Scriptures their special care. It is right, however, that at this historic occasion we should recall the way by which our Baptist leaders were led by God in opening up the way, and with what labour and sacrifice they achieved success. Without unworthy sectarian spirit we may also recount the reasons which compelled Baptists to take their own distinctive line in founding and maintaining the Bible Translation Society.

Before 1840, Carey and his loyal and heroic colleagues Marshman and Ward had passed to their rest, leaving a magnificent legacy of accomplished work in Bible versions produced and printed by the Baptist Mission in forty-five languages at least. In the next fifty years this enterprise was sustained, revisions were made, new fields were entered, and new languages were added to the list. In the B.M.S. Centenary Volume the number recorded was fifty-six. But this was not quite accurate nor complete. It should have been sixty.

More rapid advance has been made since 1892 through the opening up of Central Africa and the Arthington enterprises. The Bible Translation Society has also made grants towards the making and publishing of versions by Baptists working outside the fields occupied by the B.M.S. itself. So that the present list stands at eighty-one. It is a great record.

### 1. THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS.

Wherever Oriental scholarship was appreciated, the vast learning of the Serampore Missionaries and the stupendous range of their labour was applauded.

The mistake is still sometimes made of referring to Dr. William Carey, the missionary, as a "consecrated cobbler," as though, without preparatory training and adequate scholarship he had entered upon his great work of Biblical translation. This is very far from the truth. He certainly had to pursue his early studies alone with his books and without the advantage of tuition. But few indeed of the working preachers of his day, or even of the present day, could be said to be as well versed in the Scriptures in their original tongues as was the pastor of Harvey Lane Church, Leicester, in 1792. Andrew Fuller wrote to Dr. Chalmers: "I knew Carey when he made shoes for the maintenance of his family; yet even then his mind had received an evangelical stamp, and his heart burned incessantly with desire for the salvation of the heathen. Even then he had acquired a considerable acquaintance with Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French. And why? Because his mind was filled with the idea

of being some day a translator of the Word of God into the languages of those who sit in darkness."

On the long voyage by sailing-ship to India in 1793, in the company of Surgeon John Thomas, who had been for some years in Bengal, Carey studied the Bengali language; and with him exercised himself in translating Genesis from Hebrew into Bengali. In his early days at Madnabati, as an Indigo planter, he eagerly pursued his Bengali studies. He also began Hindustani and Sanskrit. He wrote to Andrew Fuller on the 16th November, 1796: "I expect the New Testament in Bengali will be complete before you receive this, except a very few words which may want attention on a third or fourth revisal; and now I wish the printing to be thought of." In 1798, with the generous help of Mr. Udny, he had purchased a second-hand wooden printing press, which was afterwards taken to Serampore and became the nucleus of the extensive plant which in a few years was famous for its manufacture of paper, its type foundry in many oriental scripts, its issue of Scripture versions, and much Christian literature, as well as its large output of vernacular and English newspapers. In January, 1800, Carey and Thomas joined their new colleagues in the Danish settlement of Serampore. Joshua Marshman and William Ward were inspired with the same vision of Scripture translation and printing. Their well-considered plan was to begin with the six chief languages of Northern India. To publish Carey's Bengali New Testament was their first task. Ward was the master printer and, on 18th March, 1800, the impression of the first page of Matthew's Gospel was taken. On the 7th February, 1801, the last sheet of the New Testament was put into Carey's hands, and on the 5th March a service of thanksgiving and dedication was held in the chapel, when the first bound copy of the New Testament in Bengali was completed.

Copies of that 2,000 edition, which Ward predicted would be "2,000 missionaries," found their way to many distant parts of the land. Years afterwards a little group of peasant-worshippers were discovered in the district of Dacca nourishing their religious life by reading a copy of Carey's first edition of the New Testament, though they had never met a Christian preacher, and no one knew how they came into the possession of their treasured volume.

In 1801, Carey's reputation as a linguist led to his being appointed to teach oriental languages in the British Government College for Civil Servants in Calcutta. His own subjects were Bengali, Marathi and Sanskrit. In addition to the production of the necessary text-books, grammars and lexicons for his students, Carey began with the aid of Indian pundits the transla-

tions of the Bible into Marathi and Sanskrit. His knowledge of Sanskrit became of pivotal importance because, as the classic language of the Hindu religion, it is known by the pundits of all the different language areas of Hindustan. Carey therefore attached to himself at Serampore a group of capable and willing helpers, to each of whom was given the congenial task of studying his Sanskrit Bible, published in 1808 and 1809, and preparing a transcript of it in his own vernacular. Meanwhile Carey, with astonishing avidity, set himself to learn his pundit's own language, and line by line reviewed and corrected the translation for the press. A bolder or more heroic task was never conceived. In this way, through thirty years of prodigious toil, Carey was able not only personally to prepare for publication the versions of the whole Bible in *Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit*, and *Assamese*, but to supervise the translations of the New Testament and smaller portions in other tongues. The wonderful list grew to include thirty-five languages of India before Carey's death, not counting the Maldivi, of which the fount and the manuscript were destroyed in the 1812 fire.

Asked how he was able to master so many tongues, his answer was "none knew what they could do till they tried," and "having mastered Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian, Panjabi and Dravidian, Telegu and all else was comparatively simple"! He modestly wrote in 1813: "If I could learn languages faster the work of translation would be more rapid. But some of the languages are very difficult and differ so widely from others as to occasion me much hard labour. Every translation goes through my hands except the Burmese and the Chinese." As the long list of versions became known, and funds for the publication of them were sought, there were some ill-natured critics who charged the Serampore missionaries with compiling fictitious lists. One of these critics in his ignorance and temerity fastened upon the *Konkani* New Testament as an instance, declaring that no such language was spoken, and Carey had himself invented it. The saintly scholar on this occasion indulged himself in a humorous invitation to his critic to try for himself to invent a language akin to English or Latin and to maintain its construction through a work as large as the New Testament. Very striking and ample vindication of Carey came as late as 1884, when the Basel missionaries of Mangalore, working among Kanarese, found a copy of Carey's *Konkani* New Testament and reprinted Mark and John with only a few changes for use among the people they found using that tongue.

It is interesting to note that the Serampore Press, though it issued the New Testament first in any language, issued it as "volume five" of the Bible, so that sections of the Old

Testament, as the translation proceeded, might be added thereto and complete the whole Bible in five volumes. In Carey's own lifetime only six complete Indian Bibles were issued—twenty-four other languages had the New Testament, and others had Gospel portions.

The first portion of Scripture in the *Burmese* language was St. Matthew's Gospel, published in Serampore in 1815, being the work of Carey's son, Felix, who had been a missionary in Burma since 1808 and had in 1811 prepared a pamphlet of Scripture extracts in Burmese.

With the sending forth of Carey's son, Jabez, to Amboyna in the Dutch East Indies, there opened up a new field of Baptist missionary interest and of Bible translation. An edition of the *High Malay* New Testament was printed at Serampore in 1814. In 1815 the Gospels were printed in *Low Malay*, and the New Testament was published in 1835. In the *Batta* language of Sumatra, Burton and Ward translated the Gospel of John and completed the New Testament in 1820.

In 1829 the Serampore Press issued Brückner's version of the New Testament in *Javanese*.

While Dr. Carey's record is quite unique, it must not be overlooked that his colleagues also achieved extraordinary results.

The earliest extant complete book of printed *Chinese* Scripture is a volume containing St. Matthew's Gospel and a few chapters of Genesis, published at Serampore in March, 1805. This translation was made by John Lassar, an Armenian born at Macao, who worked under the supervision of Joshua Marshman. In 1810 another edition of Matthew and of Mark was printed at Serampore. For fifteen years Marshman devoted much of his time to laborious study of Chinese with Lassar, and to the translation of the Scriptures into High Wenli. The whole Bible in Chinese, printed in movable metal type, was printed at Serampore in 1822, the year before Morrison and Milne finished their great version. In 1847 a grant was made to the General Baptist Mission for reprinting Marshman's Chinese New Testament with revisions.

For the people of Ceylon the Baptist missionary, John Chater, laboured to produce the *Sinhalese* Bible, which appeared in 1823. And in 1860 his successor, Charles Carter, completed a new translation of the New Testament, followed by the Old Testament in 1876. Since then several revisions have been made, the latest, 1938, being by a Union Committee, including S. F. Pearce and J. S. Weerasinghe.

*Malayalam* is the Indian vernacular spoken by the Syrian Christian Community, though their liturgical worship is in Syriac. A translation of the Gospels into Malayalam was made

in 1811. For the *Tamil* speaking people of the Malabar coast, Fabricius' Tamil version was revised and published at Serampore in 1813.

The *Persian* translation begun by William Ward in 1803 at Serampore was laid aside in favour of the publication in Calcutta of Major Colebrooke's translation. But in 1841 the Bible Translation Society issued a Persian version of the New Testament.

Henry Martyn's translation of the New Testament into *Urdu* was issued from the Serampore Press for the Bible Society in Arabic characters in 1815, and another edition in Devanagari characters two years later. In 1839 the Baptist Mission published the Urdu New Testament translated by Dr. Yates.

#### THE VERSIONS OF THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS, 1792—1842.

First issue :

1801 Bengali.	1821 Nepali.
1808 Sanskrit.	1821 Bagheli (Baghelkhandi).
1809 Gujarati.	1821 Kanauji.
1809 Oriya.	1821 Marwari.
1811 Hindi.	1822 Harauti.
1811 Marathi.	1823 Kanarese (Kurnata).
1812 Telegu.	" First made in 1805 and destroyed in 1812 fire.
1815 Panjabi (Sikh) (Gurmuckhi).	1824 Bhatneri (Virat).
1815 Baluchi (3 gosp.).	1824 Braj Bhasha.
1815 Jaipuri (Matt.).	1825 Kumaoni (to Col.).
1816 Mewari (Matt.) (Udaipuri).	1825 Sindhi (Matt.).
1818 Konkani.	1826 Dogri (Jumbu).
1818 Pashto (Afghan).	1826 Magahi.
1819 Assamese.	1826 Malvi (Ujjaini).
1819 Lahnda (Multani).	1827 Garhwali.
1820 Bikaneri.	1827 Manipuri.
1820 Awadhi (Matt. & Mk.) (Kausali).	1827 Palpa.
1821 Kashmiri.	1831 Khasi. (See list of thirty-five in S. P. Carey's <i>Biography</i> of <i>William Carey</i> [1933 edition].)

*Never issued:*

1811 Maldivi. Four gospels by Leyden destroyed in the Fire, 1812.

*The following were also edited and issued from the Serampore Press:*

1805	Chinese.	1815-20	Batta.
1811	Malayalam.	1823	Sinhalese.
1813	Tamil.	1829	Javanese.
1814-35	Malay.	1839	Urdu.
1815	Burmese.	1841	Persian.

A total of forty-five.

## II. THE FORMATION OF THE BIBLE TRANSLATION SOCIETY IN 1840.

It was just before the death of Dr. Carey that the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society intimated to the Serampore Missionaries their regrettable decision to withdraw the friendly and generous co-operation they had given for many years unless their versions ceased to contain the translation "immerse" for the Greek word "baptise."

Carey had been among the first to hail with joy the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, and he and his colleagues had gratefully accepted its grants. They had always held it to be their duty to give as far as possible a complete and correct translation of the sacred text, and as Indian languages are rich in terms capable of expressing the meaning of the ordinance of baptism, they felt that there could be no reasonable excuse for transliterating the foreign word, especially as the observance of immersion was, and still is, a common religious practice among the people of India. The Bible Society's resolution was a disappointing blow to the Baptist Mission, and led to a prolonged correspondence in the hope of finding a ground of agreement.

The Bible Society's Committee wrote to Serampore in February, 1832: "Our consciences would not be offended by the adoption of your views, but there are others who do feel conscientiously on the subject as well as yourselves, and who feel strongly that they cannot yield the point any more than you, and here is the difficulty which presents itself in full force to such a body as the Committee of the Bible Society."

There was no question as to the scholarly accuracy of the Serampore versions in other respects. Indeed, the permission of the Baptists was sought to the adoption of their versions with the substitution of the transliterated word "baptise" instead of the word signifying "immerse." This the Baptists felt they ought not to refuse, although they could not accept any responsibility for the change. This action was acknowledged in the British and Foreign Bible Society report of 1836 in the following

terms: "The Baptist Missionaries at Serampore and those at Calcutta, with a liberality that does them honour, have permitted the Committee to consider themselves at liberty to use the versions of the Scriptures published at their respective presses with such alterations as the Committee may deem needful in the disputed word for baptism."

This permission has never been withdrawn, but has been extended to subsequently made versions and revisions. Other compromises have from time to time been proposed for new versions made by B.M.S. missionaries. The Bible Society itself has not been entirely consistent, and has issued versions for others in which "baptise" has been translated. We have made no objection to that, though we might possibly have questioned the adequacy of the translation in some instances. It would have been but equitable for us to receive the same treatment in respect to versions for communities where there are no Christians of any other denomination in the same language area who could be offended by the translation "immerse." We have favoured, and have formally accepted, the proposal that in B.M.S. versions, when used by others and if assisted by the Bible Society, the transliteration of "baptise" should be in the text and "immerse" inserted in a footnote or the margin. But all compromises tend to short life and may easily be challenged or ignored in the next generation. The crisis, however, came in 1840, when the Baptists had to decide what they would do in face of the withdrawal of the Bible Society's aid. Their decision was to pay the price of their liberty and to continue the issue, without alteration so far as their own editions were concerned, of the Serampore versions. They would also carry on their great task of translation in future. On the 24th March, 1840, therefore, in New Park Street Chapel, London, the inaugural meeting of the Bible Translation Society was held and largely attended. Its Chairman was Mr. W. Brodie Gurney, the Treasurer of the B.M.S. Those who took part in the proceedings were Dr. Steane, the Secretary of the Baptist Union, Principal Murch of Stepany College, and the Revs. J. H. Hinton, J. Hoby, F. A. Cox, C. Stovel and W. Gray. The Society then formed has had a noble record, and has been led and supported by a great succession of loyal Baptists. Its laymen Treasurers have included E. B. Underhill, J. Marnham, A. H. Baynes, G. B. Leechman and J. Hinds. Originally a separate Society, acting as an Auxiliary of the B.M.S., it has now become more closely incorporated with the B.M.S. under the Bible Translation and Literature Committee. Excellent use has been made of its unfettered liberty not only to initiate and foster Bible translation in new fields occupied by the B.M.S., but to give assistance in



the translations of Baptist missions in other areas. It has been able also to issue portions of Scriptures with simple introductions and footnotes suitable for non-Christian readers, gospel invitations and Christian hymns—such as the rules of the Bible Society do not permit. So the Word of God has not been bound or hindered by what many on both sides of the dispute so deeply deplored—but far otherwise.

In the Translation Memoir of 1833 it was reckoned that in forty years the Missionaries of Serampore and the B.M.S. had published translations in forty languages, more than 212,000 volumes had been printed and made available in the languages spoken by 250 millions of people. On this great work £91,500 had been expended.

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(To be concluded.)

*In the Service of Suffering*, by Clement C. Chesterman, O.B.E., M.D., M.R.C.P. (Carey Press, 2s.)

Dr. Chesterman writes as interestingly as he speaks: no praise could be higher. This book, which has the sub-title, *Phases of Medical Missionary Enterprise*, is of absorbing interest. In the course of eight chapters the growth of medical missions is traced, and their future discussed. The author's personal experiences on the Congo, and his intimate knowledge of Indian medical missions, give the book an authoritative background, and it is likely to remain the most useful book on the subject. We marked many sentences and paragraphs worthy of quotation. Here is one: "Thus, splints for a fracture can be likened to the quiet, restful waiting upon God in prayer; oxygen for pneumonia to the breath of a new spiritual power; and the liberation of pus through the incision into an appendix abscess resembles the sincere confession of a man cut to the heart by the foulness of his inner life."