

THE MAKING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NEW TESTAMENT¹

BY KENNETH W. CLARK, B.D., PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
IN DUKE UNIVERSITY, NORTH CAROLINA

It is you who are the Salt of the earth ; but, if the salt should lose its strength, what will you use to restore its saltness ? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown away, and trampled underfoot.

It is you who are the Light of the world. A town that stands on a hill cannot be hidden. Men do not light a lamp and put it under the corn-measure, but on the lamp-stand, where it gives light to every one in the house. Let your light so shine before the eyes of your fellow-men, that, seeing your good actions, they may praise your Father who is in Heaven.

Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law or the Prophets ; I have not come to do away with them, but to complete them. For I tell you, until the heavens and the earth disappear, not even the smallest letter, nor one stroke of a letter, shall disappear from the Law until all is done.

Matthew v. 13-18. (*The Twentieth Century New Testament.*)

SINCE the publication of the first edition of the King James Bible in 1611, the New Testament has been re-translated, in whole or in part, more than 300 times. During the last fifty years, translation has been especially active and has yielded about 100 different versions, of which 45 include the New Testament or the entire Bible. Each translator has had his special purpose, often reflected in the form of his title. For example :

- 1895 Ferrar Fenton : *The New Testament in Modern English.*
- 1897 Robert D. Weekes : *The New Dispensation.*
- 1899 F. W. Grant : *The Numerical Bible.*
- 1900 Henry Hayman : *The Epistles of the New Testament . . . in the Popular Idiom.*
- 1901 James Moffatt : *The Historical New Testament.*
- 1903 R. F. Weymouth : *The New Testament in Modern Speech, an idiomatic translation into Everyday English.*
- 1918 E. S. Buchanan : (Lk, Jn, Acts) *An Unjudaized Version* (based on Latin).
- 1920-34 National Adult School Union : *The Books of the Old Testament in Colloquial English.*

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 8th of December, 1954.

- 1925-32 Arthur E. Overbury: *The People's New Covenant . . . from the Meta-Physical Standpoint . . . a revision unhampered by so-called ecclesiastical authority.*
- 1922 Chaplain F. S. Ballentine: *A Plainer Bible for Plain People in Plain American.*

The lineage of the official English Bible is clearly traceable from the King James Version, through the English Revised Version of 1881, the American Standard Version of 1901, to the Revised Standard Version in 1952 in America, whose British counterpart is even now in the making. But less well known is the continual production of private translations which have their day—and, indeed, reflect their day. The best of these private translations have had large effect upon the periodic official translations. *The Twentieth Century New Testament*, in particular, was a pioneer of modern speech versions. It had an important effect upon its generation, and a significant influence upon subsequent versions. If, in addition, its story contains something of romance and mystery, its fascination does not in the least diminish the strategic importance of this version which made its appearance with the new century.

The title-page mentioned no translator by name and, whoever had done the work, he or they have remained unknown until a recent day. A short preface, dignified and restrained, gave no hint of the trials and tribulations through fourteen years of difficult labours. Twenty years ago, perhaps the last survivor of the partners carefully deposited the secretary's records in the John Rylands Library, and these were recently made available through the kindness of the Librarian, Professor Edward Robertson.¹

It is certain that no translation had ever been undertaken by so unusual a procedure, or by so strange a group of translators, and it will be of interest to inquire in due course as to the quality of the finished work. The earliest record is a letter of 29 September 1891, which refers to beginnings in the previous year,

¹ In 1898, Professor Edgar J. Goodspeed (later famed as a New Testament translator) was a youthful member of the staff of the University of Chicago when he visited England and learned of this translation project. In his subsequent teaching, he was wont to refer to this otherwise obscure story and also mentioned the deposit of the records in 1933. They now form Rylands Eng. MS. 750.

reported only by word of mouth. Mrs. Mary Kingsland Higgs, who lived in Greenacres, Oldham (near Manchester), was the wife of a Congregational minister. She was a leader and teacher of youth, and had four children of her own, and had become disturbed because the young people did not understand the idiom of the traditional Bible. She wrote of her problem to W. T. Stead, the editor of the new *Review of Reviews*, and herself began to prepare an idiomatic translation of the Gospel of Mark. In another corner of England lived a signal and telegraph engineer, Ernest de Mérimol Malan of Newland, Hull, who also had four children. He was the grandson of a noted Swiss Reformed preacher (Dr. Caesar Malan) and followed the custom of reading the Bible to his children. The family was bi-lingual and Malan observed that the modern French version by Lasserre was better understood than was the traditional English Bible. He too wrote to W. T. Stead, of whose Helpers' Association he was a member.

Mr. Stead referred the two correspondents to one another, and they soon began collaboration in translating the Gospel of Mark. As they progressed, they expanded the plan to include the Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. They also sought to enlist additional partners, and in 1891 W. T. Stead printed a notice inviting "co-workers in the task of translating the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles into our every-day speech".¹ It explained the purpose, to place an Englishman "on the same footing as his forefathers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for whom the Authorized and other English versions were printed in the 'vulgar tongue'"—an objective reminiscent of Wycliffe and Tyndale and Luther. Malan optimistically declared: "If each worker undertook a few chapters and submitted the same to all the other translators . . . the work would soon be done and ere long we may hope to present to all English-speaking working men and women, and children of all classes, a version which they could read without difficulty." It was perhaps well that he could not then know that the task was to require an arduous fourteen-year period, throughout which many physical and mental trials would afflict the group of partners.

¹ *Review of Reviews*, iv (1891), 288, 391, 554; vi (1892), 250; vii (1893), 317.

When the King James Version and the Revised Version were planned, the most prominent Hebrew and Greek scholars in Britain were selected for the work. But in the making of *The Twentieth Century New Testament* the universities had no part and officialdom played no hand. It was a common objective, sought by common men, in the interest of common people.

The first appeal for assistance brought together in 1891 a strange conglomerate of twenty persons. For a long time they collaborated only by correspondence and never met one another. This had one fortunate result, when, in January 1892, Malan requested an autobiographical sketch from each to serve as an introduction to all—fifteen of these sketches are preserved among the papers, thus serving to introduce the translators to us also.¹

From the first, Malan became the driving force in the project and served as its secretary. He was but 33 at the start, but he carried the heaviest burden in the problems of translating, revising, financing and publishing. Meanwhile, he advanced in his career as an engineer until an appointment in 1895 required him to travel abroad and removed him somewhat from participation. As early as 1892, he fell ill under the double strain, complaining of influenza, brain-fever and over-work, but nevertheless continued in the project with increasing assistance from others. His grandfather was a leader in the Reformed Church in Geneva, but Ernest was educated in England as well as in a Moravian school on Lake Geneva. He was baptized and confirmed in the Church of England. As an adult he was prominent in the Congregational Church in Howden, but later (1890) in Hull joined the Wesleyan Church. He writes of having been influenced by Henry Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, of losing sympathy with creeds and dogmas, and of becoming a teetotaller since 1888. These few facts of his life suggest a distinctive personality, frequently in tension, reaching independent decisions.

Also assuming a vigorous part in the project was Mary Ann Kingsland Higgs, a few years his senior. Her father was a Congregational minister whose last appointment was at Bradford

¹ A picture of each also was requested but all were subsequently returned except that of Malan, which alone is preserved in the file.

(1862-76), as minister of the College Chapel. There he died when the daughter was 22 years old. Two years previously she had become the first woman to receive a science degree at Girton College, Cambridge; then had stayed on as Assistant Lecturer. At 25 (in 1879), she married a Congregational minister, a graduate of the University of London; and together they promoted the building of churches and schools in various parishes. There were four children, and, in addition, youth groups in the churches whom she sought to train. Her health broke when she was 34 years of age, and two years later her husband lost his church. Yet this was the very time that she was translating the Gospel of Mark, and about to undertake the long and difficult task for the New Testament as a whole. Years later, we find her publishing religious tracts, and one in particular in 1910 shows her to be a perceptive pioneer in the early movement of religious education. She was, indeed, a most remarkable woman, and before her death in 1937 had been honoured with the Order of the British Empire.¹

Let us briefly meet a few others of the more prominent members. The Reverend Henry Bazett described himself as a Huguenot ex-curate, although he had been ordained in the Church of England. As a graduate of Oxford, he had first become a schoolmaster in Wales. He was secretary of the White Cross Army, and a member of the Social Purity League. Only two of his four children still lived. His own health broke and he sought convalescence in America, where his leisure permitted the reading of socialistic books. Upon returning to England he sent a letter of resignation to Bishop Thorold of Rochester, which he also submitted to the *Manchester Guardian* and other papers. For a while he was active in the Women's Trades Union Association, and the Consumers' League. He had since become a Classics Master and private tutor to his young cousins on a farm in Cape Town, and recently published *The People's Version of James' Letter*. His health required him to move back northward and he settled in Southwick near Brighton during the years of his participation in the project.

¹ Hartley Bateson paid high tribute to her in *A Centenary History of Oldham* (1949).

Thomas Sibley Boulton was only 20 years old. He had been educated in Birmingham, the last four years under the Reverend E. F. M. MacCarthy. At 16 he became an accountant. He read Ruskin and Kingsley, and embraced socialism. At the age of 18 his health broke. Subsequently, he became a Master in Music and Language and then returned to college. He abstained from both alcohol and tobacco. He wrote of his desire for "a re-union of Christianity".

W. M. Copland was a Headmaster who had been educated in Aberdeen where he distinguished himself at the University. For one year he read for Divinity, but after reading Isaac Taylor renounced creeds and dogmas. For thirty years, so he reported, he had rejected the Trinity, the Immortality of the Soul, and a Personal Devil as pagan superstitions contrary to scripture. He was often in poor health. Calling himself "a Radical in Politics and Religion", he declared that "the Lord Jesus . . . has promised to come back to put matters right. [I] expect this in connection with the present gigantic preparations for war—Russia's designs on the East, etc."

The Reverend Edward Bruce Cornford, 30 years of age, had taken a Cambridge degree in Theology, shifted to the study of Medicine, and travelled abroad. He had worked in the slums of Walworth, and returned to read Theology with the Very Reverend Dean Vaughan, Master of the Temple, and was ordained at Farnham by Bishop Harold Browne. In 1888 he had published a moralistic story in *Our Boys Magazine*.

W. M. Crook was the eldest son of an Irish Wesleyan minister. He stood high in his studies at Trinity College, Dublin, and later was a Master in Classics. At 21 ill health caused a temporary withdrawal. He later became a lecturer for the National Liberal Club and The "80" Club, and was a Radical Home Ruler.

The Reverend Peter William Darnton was the son of a manufacturer of musical instruments. He did not attend a university but entered business at 16. Yet he was "bookish" and spent the evenings at the Mutual Improvement Society learning to speak and to write. At 22, he returned to schooling and became a Congregational minister though he begrudged

the time required for sermon-making. A widower with four daughters, his last pastorate was at Bristol where he entertained the Revisers as late as 1903.

The Reverend Edward Deacon Girdlestone was possibly the oldest member, at 63, and a stalwart associate. He and his father were Anglican clergymen. After college and teaching, he was ordained at 23 but two years later decided that this had been a mistake. In a state of indecision he continued intermittently to work and to preach. In his mid-thirties he married a woman of means and soon retired. Later as a widower he re-married at 50, and for a while tutored privately. He claims a number of published articles, mostly socialistic.

The Reverend E. Hampden-Cook was a Congregationalist, a "broad Evangelical", 32 years old. He once attended Owens College and Lancashire Independent College, but received his degree from Cambridge. His pastorates stretched from New South Wales and New Zealand to London, Wales, and Cheshire. In 1903, he prepared the posthumous Weymouth translation for publication. He reported his belief "in three personal advents of Christ, holding that the second took place in A.D. 70, and that there is a third yet to come, death being meanwhile to the individual the coming of the Lord".¹

A. Ingram was a Presbyterian, born in Aberdeen. He listed successive occupations as cowboy, grocer, draper, lawyer's and accountant's clerk, and journalist since 1880. He was a widower with three children.

One of the more prominent associates was the Reverend Henry Charles Leonard, a retired Baptist minister selected by W. T. Stead to serve as treasurer. He was one of the Revisers, and performed the special task of making Synoptic parallels consistent. During the period of his participation, a series of misfortunes included the death of his wife in 1895 after a long illness, the loss of one eye and other "oft infirmities" of long standing.

Finally, let us meet the only other woman among the partners. She was Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Butterworth Mee, who was related to Sir Joseph Butterworth, an emancipationist. Her father was

¹ Schaff-Herzog, *Religious Encyclopedia*, xii. 554.

a woollen manufacturer in Huddersfield, but had lost much of his money. She was educated at the school run by the daughters of the Reverend Daniel Walton. At 29 she married the Wesleyan minister, Josiah Mee, and bore him six children while they worked in numerous circuits. Her health failed at 36, and later she is found to be the President of the Women's Health Association, and occasionally doing Temperance work. She taught a Sunday School class for twenty years. She, and at least one other of the partners, knew no Greek, but they served on the English Committee to review the translation for its proper idiom.

There is not the space here to introduce other members of the group, but these will serve to inform us as to its general composition. After the initial stage of the work, twelve more workers were enlisted but unfortunately their biographies were never requested, perhaps because personal conferences had to some extent replaced correspondence. Altogether, thirty-five persons were associated with the translation, including as advisers three prominent scholars: G. G. Findlay of Headingley College, J. R. Harris of Cambridge, and R. F. Weymouth, retired Headmaster of Mill Hill School.

Certainly this company of translators is no ordinary assemblage, and it is difficult to imagine a more disparate group. The members range in age between 19 and 63. In education they vary widely. They represent all parts of the British Isles. About half of them are clergymen, of which probably none is a typical representative. Others are schoolmasters, business men, and housewives. They belong to the Church of England, Wesleyans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, and one speaks of himself as a Huguenot. Among them, there are many whose records show a procession through successive religious affiliations. Several of the clergymen have experienced repeated doubts as to their calling, and some have forsaken their orders altogether.

It is a company of liberal and independent thinkers, strong-minded, and even opinionated. Their struggle with life—social, political, and intellectual—is reflected in the tensions and ill-health which they report, for hardly a single biography lacks this

element. It was grim realism, in the Articles of Association drafted in 1898, that included a provision : " If any partner shall die, retire, or become lunatic. . . ." As a group, their children are numerous, and domestic problems have created a heavy and constant strain. Among them are many Socialists, some self-styled Radicals, and almost all have engaged in numerous social services toward reform and uplift. They hold in common a sympathy for the mass of workers. A number of them have written articles on social and religious reforms, and some have previously engaged in translating, or at least in re-phrasing, the English New Testament.

Compare such a group with the scholarly and academic group which had produced the English Revised Version only a decade before. It is a non-professional group, whose translating was motivated by social causes and by the desire to mediate the Word of God in a plainer English idiom. A more fascinating company of workers can hardly be imagined, and fascination becomes greater when we see them against the background of their time. They worked during the last decade of the Victorian era which was ablaze with political and social revolution. The Home Rule controversy was at its height, and one member who had been reared in an Irish Wesleyan family openly declared his advocacy of Home Rule. The Socialist movement was everywhere astir, and many of the translators affirmed their sympathy with it. Free education for the poor had but recently been granted, the electorate had been enlarged, and new land regulations were being pressed into law.

In the realm of religion, there were under debate the problems of Church and State, freedom of worship, atheism and the Oath, the observance of the Sabbath, ritualism, and marriage and burial regulations. It was truly an age of social ferment and popular reform. It is not suggested here that *The Twentieth Century New Testament* was designed as a propagandist instrument to apply to such controversies, but in its reverent sincerity it was nevertheless a natural expression of its time. It reflects in its chosen phrases a humanistic and naturalistic approach to religious and social concerns. It has frequently been pointed out that the New Testament documents were originally composed in

colloquial language and for the common people. The last decade of the nineteenth century was such an age as to commit the New Testament once again to the ordinary man, and to provoke the purpose of these translators—all of whom shared the life of the common people—"to present to all English-speaking men and women" a version of the New Testament adapted to their common need and understanding. At the beginning of the project the Secretary wrote of his hope "that the whole work will be undertaken in a prayerful spirit, each worker asking for Divine guidance for both himself and his fellow-workers".

II

Yet it is not enough to recognize the powerful human forces that surged about and within the group of translators, even as they worked. We must consider certain critical questions concerning the product of their labours. How well conceived were the method and the principles by which they proceeded? How well were they equipped for their task? What were the quality and the influence of the translation they produced?

Malan's second Circular, sent out in December 1891, outlines organization and procedure, though these were considerably altered as the project developed. The plan, in general, now represents standard practice in group translating, and therefore stands as an illustration of how translations are made. Here are the steps :

1. The original twenty collaborators were divided into five groups, each consisting of three to five members ; and a Gospel or the Book of Acts was assigned to each group, and a portion thereof allotted to each member. Parenthetically, it may be noted that two years later assignments were similarly made for the Epistles and the Revelation.
2. Each member was to translate his assigned portion, and to circulate instalments to receive the criticism by each member of his group.
3. When all this has been accomplished within the groups, each group is to interchange and criticize the work of the other groups.
4. Then the original translator of a portion shall consider all criticisms, but is free to exercise his own discretion about accepting them.
5. Each group shall choose one of its members as Reviser, who shall be its representative on a Revising Committee to which the resultant draft shall be submitted.

6. Translations are to be circulated among Revisers, and such changes as are approved by two-thirds are to be noted in red ink. (We pause here to note that the Revising Committee was thus composed of five Revisers and therefore no less than four votes would fulfil the two-thirds requirement. A note in 1895, however, refers to six Revisers at that time—which simplified the arithmetic.)
7. Each group Reviser is to criticize the translation prepared by his own group, and to present and defend the same before a meeting of the Revising Committee, where finally a majority would rule. (It is to be noted here that at this stage a three-fifths vote would prevail; whereas in the later stage, a two-thirds vote.)
8. Each translator, having been thus represented, shall abide by the decision of the Revising Committee.
9. An English Committee, selected from the translators, is to review the translation to improve the English idiom.
10. All translations are to be printed on "slip sheets" which will circulate widely for criticism, even outside the company of translators.
11. At a later stage in the project, an effort was made to organize an American Company for collaboration. But it was debated whether American scholars should be invited to criticize the slip-sheet text or a later, tentative publication. Ultimately, nothing came of the proposal and no American participation developed. It should here be recalled that an American Company had been formed to collaborate on the 1881 revision and were even now preparing the American Standard Version which was to make its appearance in 1901.
12. Finally, a full but tentative publication in three parts would allow wider circulation and fuller criticism; from which would derive the definitive publication in one volume.

Surely no group translation was ever prepared with greater precaution or better safeguards against error or private whims. In general, the plan was adhered to, with a few modifications. For example, some members later refused to criticize the translation of another in the group, and therefore instead of circulating a first draft within the group all members were instructed to submit their work to the separate criticisms of Peirson and White. Since this change was not made until January 1895, it affected only the Epistles and the Revelation. Such modifications of the original plan were simply sensible adjustments to developing circumstances. In February 1892, the Secretary began to circulate a "Word-book" which started off with eighty-eight problematic terms (e.g. *εὐαγγέλιον*, *χριστός*, *κύριος*, *δοῦλος*, *μετανοῖα*, etc.), and inviting comment on their proper translation. It contained also questions about the final format. The

“Word-book” was kept in continual circulation among the members, who added answers, comments, and questions as it went round.

Organization and procedure required arrangements for finance. Each translator was to work at his own expense. Subscriptions from the translators would defray the cost of revising, editing, and publishing. The copyright would be held by the entire company, and at one time it was expected that individual subscribers might obtain a profit. It was first estimated that £100-150 would be needed, to put 5,000 copies of the Gospels and Acts on sale at 1s. The amount would be divided into £1 shares to be taken up by the translators as far as possible, and then by private subscription. Each subscriber must pay to the Treasurer immediately 2s. 6d. per share, and each would be liable to the extent of his fully paid-up shares. Because they were strangers to one another, W. T. Stead was to nominate a Treasurer who must bank all funds in the name of the Company and render audited accounts to the subscribers. He selected the Reverend H. C. Leonard, a retired Baptist minister of Isleworth, Middlesex; and Malan and Homer completed the Finance Committee.

It was first stated that any profits would be paid as dividends on the shares. Later it was decided only to reimburse each subscriber, and to use the surplus to finance the translation of the Epistles, to advertise, to distribute some free copies and to make possible a lower selling price. This shift in policy caused the resignation of one member. There were continuing financial difficulties, for after five years of operation it was reported that out of twenty-five members only ten had made any contribution. A year later £100 had been raised but the estimate of need had gone much higher than in 1891. It became necessary to divide the Company into Members and Associates; the Members being those who had contributed at least £1 a year—and only they held votes. But in 1897, W. T. Stead offered to publish the translation in book form, and to pay any profits to the subscribers (who now held a 42-year copyright in England). An American copyright was arranged through Fleming H. Revell Company, and Mr. Leonard’s warning against piracy in America lost its

force. By 1901, the tentative edition of the New Testament was on sale at 2s. 8d., the three parts having been previously put out separately at 1s. 6d. Already 40,000 copies of Part 1, the Gospels and Acts, had been sold (17,000 of them in America). By 1901, subscriptions had amounted to £200 but expenses had gone over £300; however, by the end of that year profits totalled well over £300. The final edition appeared in 1904, showing substantial revision of the tentative form. In London, it was published by the Sunday School Union at 1s. 6d., and the American publisher was Fleming H. Revell. The anonymous Preface was prepared by Girdlestone, who commended the translation, "undertaken as a labour of love, to the good-will of all English-speaking people, and to the blessing of Almighty God".

The choice of the title had been most carefully considered. In January 1893, the Secretary first requested suggestions. In his Circular (No. 16) of the following September he reported six titles submitted, which he revised into the following choices:

The New Testament in Every-day English.

The New Testament in Modern English.

The New Testament in Current Language.

The New Testament in the English of To-day.

In correspondence, the first two were favoured by equal numbers and the matter was referred to the Revising Committee, with the result that a still different title was adopted:

The New Testament. People's Version.

But four years later the Company approved Girdlestone's proposal of the title:

The Twentieth Century New Testament.

The tentative edition of 1898-1901 embraced the birth of the century; while the final edition celebrates its 50th anniversary this year [i.e. 1954]. Between the two, Weymouth published his *New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903).

When one inquires into the linguistic competence of the translators, he finds little in the record that is helpful. It may safely be assumed that the fourteen clergymen had formal training in the Greek New Testament. Others had certainly

studied Classical Greek and a few were specialists in Classics. Girdlestone especially shows an astonishing perception when he writes in the Preface: "The Greek used by the New Testament writers was not the Classical Greek of some centuries earlier, but the form of the language spoken in their own day." Today this is a commonplace, but Girdlestone's insight anticipated Adolf Deissmann by many years. Grenfell and Hunt were still young scholars, still digging up papyri in Egypt. It was therefore an "advanced" conception as to the nature of the Greek, which enabled these translators to set a precedent for the treatment of the New Testament text.

Nevertheless, the heterogeneous Company presented a problem, which was reflected in the communication of November 1891: Our task is "to secure on each group sufficient scholarship to ensure, that, while aiming at a good and clear vernacular, the work will bear criticism as a rendering of the Greek text". It is "not possible to ensure perfection among a body of voluntary and amateur translators". Five years later it must have been disheartening to report that the first slip-sheet edition of Mark required so much emendation that a second edition had to be printed, and yet Mark had been translated by Mrs. Higgs and Malan (who had collaborated upon it even before the project began), along with the Reverend Mr. Leonard (the retired Baptist minister and Treasurer)—all of whom were recognized leaders in the venture. When later the Epistles were finished, it was necessary to appoint a special committee "to bring about some uniformity". "The work has been of all qualities," the Secretary wrote, "excellent, flowing modern English, and merely verbal translation." Yet, for all this, when the Gospel of Mark was finished in 1896, Dr. Culross of Bristol exclaimed: "Your Mark is a triumph." When the first edition of Acts was printed, Weymouth pronounced it "admirably done".

There had been care to include in each of the five groups at least one member with good linguistic ability, who was likely to serve as Reviser. It was also an important factor that a few reputable scholars were allied as advisors, at least briefly. Professor J. Rendell Harris, of Clare College, Cambridge, was briefly associated in 1901, though it is not known what contribution

he made. Professor G. G. Findlay, of Headingley College, Leeds, agreed to revise John during the summer of 1892, having recently begun to publish a literal translation entitled "John's Good News". But he resigned that fall and it is not known whether or not he fulfilled his promise. R. F. Weymouth had published the *Resultant Greek Text* in 1886, when he retired as Headmaster at the Mill Hill School. Since then he had been engaged in translating the New Testament alone, and from 1895 to 1897 was allied also with the group project. In his Preface it is stated that while "full co-operation . . . has not been found practicable . . . there has been in certain parts free communication and interchange of manuscript"; and he graciously adds, "Which party is the more indebted it is difficult to say". When he resigned in 1897, it was attested by the Secretary that "he has rendered us valuable help". The tentative edition preceded that of Weymouth, which appeared posthumously in 1903 under the editorship of one of the partners, Hampden-Cook. But the final edition of 1904 benefited directly from the Weymouth version.

The greatest advantage to *The Twentieth Century New Testament* was the choice of a Greek text to translate. In 1891, the first instructions were to "use any Greek text, but as a general rule that underlying the English Revised Version".¹ But in the same year that this version appeared, Westcott and Hort published a new critical Greek text. It was perhaps T. W. Whitall who urged the use of Westcott-Hort, for late in 1891 he had supplied copies to all the translators, and thus in one stroke made a most significant contribution—for Westcott-Hort was the best critical text that had yet appeared. The Secretary further directed that Bishop Westcott was "to be consulted if punctuation or sense is changed by a translator".

The ultimate translation was true to the stated principle: "to grasp the sense of the original Greek" and to express it in modern English, "not departing from the original more than is absolutely necessary in order to bring it more into harmony with the English idiom". The values of coins, and measures of space and time were turned into their English equivalents. The

¹ This text had been edited by Palmer, and was printed the same year as the English Revised Version (1881).

translators were urged to use Saxon words, and to be consistent in translating the same Greek word everywhere. The problem of Gospel parallels was committed to the special attention of H. C. Leonard, with the objective of exhibiting the true relationship between the Gospels.

The Company agreed to use the modern "you" instead of the antiquated "thou", exception being made in prayers, in the speech of God, and in quotations from the Old Testament. A modern format was achieved by arranging the text in a single column, and in paragraphs, while relegating chapter and verse numbers to the margin. Modern English punctuation was adopted, including quotation marks. Paragraph titles were inserted to aid the reader, and Old Testament references were given in the bottom margin. Poetry was printed in its proper form, and Old Testament quotations were clearly set off from the main text "to enable the reader to see how familiar the writers were with the very words and phrases of the Septuagint". It was originally planned to print short explanatory notes, but Leonard early opposed this and his view prevailed.

Each book has a brief introduction. The order of the books is influenced by chronological considerations. Leonard had proposed in 1892 that the order of Westcott-Hort should be followed: and the final edition uses this order, with some modification.¹ The four Gospels stand first, but Mark is at the head—reflecting the recent theory of Markan priority in time.² After Acts, comes the Epistle of James (as in Westcott-Hort) but it is separated from the other General Epistles which because of their late date are placed after the Pauline Letters. The Letters of Paul are arranged according to the current theory of their chronological sequence. After all the genuine letters come the Pastorals in a neutral position, followed by the "anonymous" Letter to the Hebrews, and then the rest of the General Epistles (in the order: Peter, Jude, John). The Revelation of John comes last without regard to its earlier dating.

¹ The order in Westcott-Hort, following early manuscripts, is: Gospels, Acts, Catholic Epistles, Pauline Epistles, Revelation.

² The proposal of Carl Lachmann (1835) that Mark was the earliest of the Gospels is virtually universal in acceptance today.

III

Now, if “ the proof of the pudding is in the eating ” it would be well for us to sample a few passages from the 1904 *Twentieth Century New Testament* (in the order found there). Section A contains “ The Historical Books ”—the four Gospels and the Book of Acts—with Mark standing first.

Mark i. 4 (KJ and ERV) states that John “ preached the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins ”. This literal translation of the Greek does not yield a clear sense, and the 1904 edition strives for greater clarity : “ . . . proclaiming a baptism upon repentance, for the forgiveness of sins ”. This revision illustrates at once both loss and gain. For in the first clause a theological refinement intrudes, in the interpretation that repentance must be anterior to, or is a prerequisite of, baptism ; whereas the Greek phrase has a simple genitive whose meaning is left undefined. But in the second clause, a valid improvement is recognized in the phrase, “ for the forgiveness of sins ”. These judgements against and in favour of the 1904 translation are reflected decades later in the American Revised Standard Version (RSV) of 1946 : “ preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Here the second clause follows exactly the translation of 1904.

In Mark iv. 19 there is the allegory of the seed sown among the thorns (KJ and ERV) “ . . . the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches . . . choke the word ”. The 1904 translation runs : “ . . . the cares of life, and the glamour of wealth . . . completely choke the Message.” The change from “ the cares of the world ” to “ the cares of life ” is the result of emending the Westcott-Hort text at this point, in unwisely accepting *βίου* (observed then in Bezae and the Old Latin) in place of *αἰώνος* which has much better support. But the next phrase, “ the glamour of wealth ”, was well inspired as it corrected the interpretation of *ἀπάτη*. This general sense persists in subsequent translations such as Goodspeed’s (1923) “ the pleasure of being rich ”, and the RSV’s (1946) “ the delight in riches ”. However, when the 1904 edition inserted the word “ completely ” it was done gratuitously, for nothing in the Greek

text suggests it other than the result of fruitlessness. So once again it may be observed that judgement upon this verse is mixed, for and against, and is set off by the 1946 RSV: "the cares of the world and the delight in riches . . . choke the word."

In Mark x. 42 Christian humility is contrasted with the rulers of gentiles who (KJ and ERV) "lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them". Originally these two clauses said the same thing, but today the phrase "to lord it over" has come to imply arrogance and oppression. This implication must have been present in the 1904 translation, because the second clause is made to accord with it: "lord it over them . . . and their great men oppress them". But this translation is misleading since neither of the clauses in Greek necessarily refer to oppression but only to the gentile conception of the dominant ruler in contrast with the idea of eminence through humble service. The intrusion of the reference to oppression may well be one evidence of the influence upon the translators of the social tension and protest of their day.

Another sample is taken from the story of the woman anointing Jesus' head. In Mark xiv. 6 the ERV retains a stiff and literal translation: "She hath wrought a good work on me." How much better is the style and sense of the 1904 translation: "This is a beautiful deed she has done for me!" As recently as 1946 the RSV followed this lead, finding it necessary to make one slight revision: "She has done a beautiful thing to me."

Once again, we may sample at Mark xv. 2 where the question is asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And the answer (KJ and ERV): "Thou sayest." The debate over this obscure answer has been long and varied. For example, Westcott-Hort first suggested that the original Greek sentence may have been either declarative or interrogative. If it be taken as a question, it may remind us of the parrying between Pilate and Jesus in John xviii. 33-4: "Are you the King of the Jews?" "Do you raise this question yourself, or have others said this to you about me?" But if—more plausibly—the Markan phrase is declarative, it may remind us of the similar response in Matt. xxvi. 25 where Jesus has referred to his betrayer and Judas asks, "It is not I, is it?" and Jesus replies (literally): "You have said."

There is no question here that Jesus is confirming this identification and the 1904 version translates acceptably, “ ‘ It is ’, answered Jesus ”. So in Mark xv. 2 the version translates the same Greek idiom in the same way : “ It is true.” So translated, it amounts to an important affirmation on the part of Jesus before Pilate that he is the anointed leader of the Jews. But perhaps the evangelist was more subtle than this and intended that his idiom should be ambiguous. In this case, the wiser part is to translate ambiguously as does the RSV : “ You have said so ”, and the 1904 version may be said to have gone too far with its theological interpretation.

Now turning to the Gospel of Matthew, it is of interest to observe the beatitude in v. 5, “ Blessed are the meek ”. Here the 1904 version renders it : “ Blessed are the gentle.” This does not make easier the acceptance of an erroneous interpretation, that the gentle shall inherit the possessions of earth. It does, however, avoid the misunderstanding that arises from the popular caricature of meekness, and may therefore be applauded.

Another important revision is found in Matt. vi. 4, 6, 18, where the KJ translates that God “ will reward thee openly ” for your religious actions “ in secret ”. The 1904 edition translates : “ Your Father who sees what is in secret, will recompense you.” The reward may be no more ostentatious than the secret deed. This difference from the KJ rests upon the Greek text, since Westcott-Hort follows ancient manuscripts which omit the phrase, *ἐν τῷ φανερωῷ*. The ERV in 1881 had already acknowledged this correction in the text, and Weymouth in 1903 also agreed to it as did the RSV in 1946.

Matt. x. 8 offers an interesting sample, in the familiar phrase (KJ and ERV) : “ Freely ye received, freely give.” The adverbial term here translated does not mean, as the English may, generously or abundantly. The 1904 translators were quite correct in their version : “ You have received free of cost, give free of cost ”, and we find the recent RSV in agreement : “ You have received without pay, give without pay.”

Once more in Matthew (xxvi. 27), there is the ritualized direction (KJ and ERV) : “ Drink ye all of it.” This is ambiguous without punctuation and many have mentally punctuated

it as "Drink ye, all of it." But the 1904 edition is clear, and correct, when it renders the equally clear Greek: "Drink from it, all of you."

There is a difficult point in Luke xxii. 38, where the disciples at their Passover meal say to Jesus, "Lord, behold, here are two swords". Jesus replies (KJ and ERV): "It is enough." Many find it difficult to believe that the evangelist reported Jesus as commending the sword, and so the 1904 version translates his answer in one word of indignant remonstrance: "Enough!" But a few lines earlier it was Jesus himself who reportedly advised to sell one's cloak in order to buy a sword. However great the theological or moral difficulty may be, the obvious text means "Two swords are enough", and the 1904 edition has interpolated an inconsistent sense.

In 1904, it was a bold stroke to correct John i. 5 (KJ): "And the darkness comprehendeth it not", obscure though this traditional phrase was. The ERV had not helped at all when it altered this to "apprehended it not". It was a radical departure when the 1904 translation rendered the sentence: "And the darkness never overpowered it." This sense was both clear and correct and has been followed in many later translations as in the RSV: "And the darkness has not overcome it."

Another passage well clarified was the obscure verse of Acts v. 24. When the imprisoned apostles mysteriously disappeared, the leaders (KJ) "doubted of them whereunto this would grow". The ERV did no better with this verse, but the 1904 edition made sense of it, as follows: "They were perplexed about the Apostles and as to what all this would lead to." All important translations since have resembled this phrasing.

In Acts xxii. 22, in the course of Paul's defence, an interruption occurs when Paul speaks of his gentile mission. The KJ and ERV explain, "They gave him audience unto this word". The English here is at best ambiguous but seems to say merely that they gave attention to his remarks. But the 1904 edition renders clearly what is also clear in the Greek: "Up to this point the people had been listening to Paul." This idea is essential to the story and is reflected in later translations, as when the RSV renders: "Up to this word they listened to him."

It is at the end of Paul's defence before Agrippa, in Acts xxvi. 28, that the latter remarks (KJ): "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The ERV introduces a variant note: "With little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian." But both are rejected when the 1904 edition translates: "You are soon trying to make a Christian of me." The American Committee in 1881 had urged that the phrase be translated: "In a short time . . .", and the same sense was properly adopted in 1904. It is again reflected in the approval of the RSV: "In a short time you think to make me a Christian."

IV

Section B of *The Twentieth Century New Testament* is composed of "The Letters" and this includes both Pauline and General Epistles, arranged in a chronological sequence acceptable to the translators.

The first sample here may be noted in 1 Thessalonians ii. 6, where Paul writes (KJ and ERV): "We might have been burdensome as apostles of Christ." This obscure passage gives way to clarity in the 1904 edition: "We might have burdened you with our support." However, the improvement here is only partial as it points the way toward the complete sense of the passage well expressed in the RSV: "We might have made demands as apostles."

Again, in 1 Corinthians iii. 9 Paul explains his status and relationship by a simile: "We are God's fellow-workers. Ye are God's husbandry." But the KJ and ERV have altered the simile found in the original Greek and this is restored by the 1904 translation: "You are God's harvest field." Goodspeed has followed this closely ("You are God's farm") and the RSV almost exactly: "You are God's field."

Another statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians x. 24 is indeed perplexing when he exhorts (KJ): "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." The ERV saw the need to correct this to ". . . but each his neighbour's good." But the 1904 edition really established the form for this verse: "A man must not study his own interests, but the interests of others."

This pioneer phrasing has since been followed closely by all the best translations.

In the Hymn of Love in 1 Corinthians xiii, the 1904 edition again pioneered when it translated *ἀγάπη* as "love" rather than the traditional "charity". Here again it has been followed in all Protestant translations since. In this same chapter there occurs Paul's familiar remark (KJ and ERV): "If I give my body to be burned. . . ." The 1904 edition was the first English version to translate instead the Westcott-Hort text at this point: "Even though I sacrifice my body, that I may boast. . . ." This reading was later approved by Goodspeed, but the RSV translators stood by the traditional text.

Turning next to the Roman letter, we read that Paul had planned to visit Rome. Then follows in i. 13 the obsolete phrase: ". . . but was let hitherto." The ERV properly changed "let" to "hindered", but it was the 1904 edition that first gave a fresh and satisfactory phrasing to the sentence: ". . . until now I have been prevented", and others since have followed this exemplary form.

Also in Romans (viii. 28), the KJ and ERV report Paul's words: "All things work together for good, to them that love God". An important difference is noted in the 1904 edition: "God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love him." The change is derived from the Westcott-Hort text and has been accepted in subsequent translations.

In Philippians iii. 20 we read (KJ): "Our conversation is in heaven." This obsolete and inaccurate translation was improved in the ERV: "Our citizenship is in heaven." But again it was the 1904 edition which first presented a fully satisfactory phrasing: "The State of which we are citizens is in heaven." The contemporary Weymouth version (1903) has a similar expression: "We are free citizens of heaven." But a much closer similarity is found in the RSV (which follows Goodspeed): "Our commonwealth is in heaven."

Many have been confused by Paul's advice in Philippians iv. 6 (KJ): "Be careful for nothing." This may appear to commend improvidence and indifference toward the future. But a more acceptable sense is derived from the 1904 edition:

“Do not be anxious about anything.” The RSV acknowledges the excellence of the phrasing, by revising only slightly: “Have no anxiety about anything.”

An illustration of improvement may be noted in Hebrews xi. 40 where the KJ and ERV read: “. . . God having provided some better thing concerning us.” The 1904 edition made two important changes in this clause: “Since God had in view some better thing for us.” These changes have since been acknowledged as valid corrections and the recent RSV accepts both: “Since God had foreseen something better for us.”

Another illustration may be found in xiii. 16 (KJ and ERV): “To do good and to communicate forget not.” The word “communicate” (like the word “provide”, above) is a borrowing from the Latin Vulgate, rather than an adequate translation of the original Greek term. Although it may have conveyed the true sense in the sixteenth century, the twentieth century required the correction which the 1904 edition made: “To do good and to share what you have.” Exactly the same phrase is preserved in the recent RSV.

A final sample is taken from 1 John iv. 19 (KJ): “We love [him] because he first loved us.” Although the KJ acknowledged that the pronoun “him” is not found in the Greek text, it supplied it as essential to the proper meaning. However, the revisers in 1881 excised this addition and *The Twentieth Century* version concurred, as did all other subsequent translations. Far from requiring the insertion of the pronoun, the declaration contains a nobler sense in the literal form of the 1904 edition: “We love because he first loved us.”

These are but a few selections of the innumerable changes which the *Twentieth Century* translators brought to the English version of the New Testament. They were a reverent, but a bold and zealous company who dared to give a fresh phrasing to the English translation. They made many corrections and created many phrases which have been adopted by translators of great learning. One of these translators recognized their pioneer achievement when (in 1937) he wrote: “The 20th Century was the first of the many modern speech translations which have given us back the coherent readability of the New Testament.”

When we read *The Twentieth Century New Testament* in its definitive form, it is difficult to remember that it was produced by so strange a company as we have met. Somewhere along the line, some transforming miracle seems to have occurred. We are forced to conclude that the devotion to their task has made of them better scholars than they were at first. It is to their credit that they were always responsive to suggested revision, even to the last. Still, it is amazing to find that the finest scholars of later years paid tribute to their work by adopting many of the same phrases and perceptive insights. Much of what we may say in praise of this version of 1904 may sound commonplace today, but under the conditions of half a century ago it was extraordinary. It shares with Weymouth's New Testament the honour of inaugurating the truly modern-speech versions. Though it no longer remains in print, and is difficult to secure, its virtues have been preserved in the editions of reputable successors. It holds an honoured place in the procession of versions; and the hope of the Company of translators, as expressed in the Preface, has been amply fulfilled: ". . . that, by this modern translation, the New Testament may become a living reality to many, by whom the Authorized Version, with all its acknowledged beauties, is but imperfectly understood or never read."