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Societies are doing a work in this regard that the Boards of Missions could not well do for their own work.

In addition to this increased financial support for Scripture distribution and supply this great missionary Convention might well recommend in its findings that the Christian men of the United States and Canada seriously consider the advisability and need of building Bible Houses in Mexico City, in some important city on the Pacific coast, in Buenos Aires and in Rio de Janeiro. Such buildings would greatly add to the economy and efficiency of the work and give stability and importance to the cause.

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### THE PROBLEMS OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

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When we think of the great progress which has been made in the task of Bible translation, it would almost seem as if there could be no serious problems connected with this work, or that they had already been solved, and the question were merely one of historical interest. The facts as we know them are surprising. According to recent statistics the entire Bible has been translated into 158 languages or dialects, the New Testament into 142 more (a total of 300), one book or more of the Scriptures into 422, some chapters or verses into 48, a grand total of 770. In 1804 when the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded, "some portion of Scripture had been printed in over 60 languages." One hundred and seventeen years later the number of tongues in which the Society had promoted the translation, printing or distribution of the Bible had grown to 543; and in a little volume *The Gospel in Many Tongues* (1921), the British and Foreign Bible Society gives a verse of Scripture, usually John iii. 16, in each one of these 543 languages or dialects. In 1923 the American Bible Society issued Bibles or portions in 116 languages and dialects. The circulation in China in 1923 by the three great Bible Societies—the British and Foreign, the American, and the National Society of Scotland—was 58,000 Bibles, 85,000 Testaments and nearly seven and one-half million portions, of which total one third and more represents the work of the American Bible Society.

These statistics would seem to indicate, as I have said, that the work of Bible translation has not been a difficult one or that its problems have been largely, if not wholly solved. But such is not the case. The difficulties which have been overcome in the accomplishment of the great feat, which has been just outlined, have been tremendous. Adoniram Judson of Burma, who completed the translation of the Bible in 1834 after seven-

teen years of much interrupted labor, wrote, "I consider it the work of a man's whole life to procure a really good translation of even the New Testament in an untried language." Robert Morrison of China, the centenary of the completion of whose version in the Chinese (Wen-li) was celebrated a year ago, worked seventeen years on his translation. The splendid Arabic version—the "Van Dyck" as it is usually called—is a monument to the memory of Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck. On its completion in 1865 it had cost nearly twenty years of labor. In fact Dr. Hoskins, of the Beirut Mission, counting from 1837, when the plans for this version were made, to 1895 when Dr. Van Dyck died, speaks of the version as the result of "nearly sixty years" of effort.

It would be possible to speak of many difficulties which are involved in the translation of the Scriptures, but I must confine myself in the few moments at my disposal to a brief discussion of three. The first of these is the *disadvantageous conditions* under which this work of translation has often, perhaps usually, been carried on. We think with pleasure and satisfaction of the enthusiasm with which many native converts have received the gospel and assisted in the translation of the Holy Scriptures by their missionaries. The Aneityumese labored fifteen years in the cultivation of arrow root that they might have the whole Bible printed in their language; \$6,000 was the amount raised, and when the first Bibles were printed they came to them fully paid for. This is a bright picture in missionary history. But on the other hand when we think of the version of Acts into Erromangan, we are reminded that before it was completed by Robertson it had cost the lives of the two martyred Gordons, George and James, the one brother murdered in 1861, the other stricken down ten years later while striving to finish the work his brother had begun. Strange as it may seem, it was while revising the translation of Stephen's speech, that the life blood of James Gordon stained the manuscript written by his martyr brother. These two incidents taken from neighboring islands in the New Hebrides illustrate the bright side and the dark side of Bible translation as it concerns the natives. How large a factor by way of incentive and by way of hindrance they have been in this great work of translation only those who have made the translations can tell us. But these are not the only difficulties. We think also of the adverse natural conditions under which many of these translations were made, the intense heat of the tropics, malaria, disease, primitive conditions of all kinds, the pressure of other duties, etc. Those who have worked upon the making or revising of a version in the homeland with the aid of concordances and lexicons and all the helps which the student gathers about him can in no wise appreciate the diffi-

culties which have been overcome by a pioneer missionary in the making of a pioneer translation.

In the second place let us think of the *peculiarities of language* and the problem which they present in the translation of the Bible into many different tongues. On the one hand we have Chinese, a monosyllabic language with few vocables, no grammar to speak of, and a syntax the rules of which, we are told, are frequently more honored in the breach than the observance; yet a language with an ancient literature and a most complicated script. On the other hand we have the agglutinative languages of the American Indians with their extremely long words, so long that Cotton Mather in speaking of the Massachusetts dialect said, "One would think that these words had been growing ever since Babel unto the dimensions to which they are now extended," so long that in Eskimo, we are told, an English sentence with as many as seventeen words can be represented by a single word. Again we have in the Macasser of the Malayo-Javanese group, a language which is singularly weak in the ability to express generalizations. The difficulty of finding equivalent words or expressions in these many foreign languages has given rise to the phrase "term question." Thus, from the very start the missionaries to China had difficulty in deciding upon the exact equivalent for the words "God" and "Spirit." In the Delegates' Version of 1850, blank spaces were left for these words and these were filled in by a special conference at Shanghai. But even today we have in China two kinds of Bibles, *Shangti* and *Shen*. *Shangti* means "supreme power," *Shen*, "spirit." The dispute as to which is the proper rendering of "God" is still unsettled. The difficulty of translation some times presents itself in amusing form. Thus, in the Arabic of Van Dyck's version, the phrase in John ix. 23, "He is of age; ask him" is rendered thus: "He is complete of teeth" (*hua kanil ussinni*). And many other equally strange and amusing renderings might easily be cited.

But the third and in some respects the most important of all the problems of translation is due to the fact that the languages of non-Christian peoples are *unregenerate*. We are accustomed to speak of individuals and peoples as unregenerate, but it is not as natural to us to apply this term to languages. But there is a sense in which it is most appropriate. John Eliot, the missionary to the Indians, wrote in 1653 (ten years before the completion of his translation of the Bible into the Massachusetts dialect), "I have had a great longing desire, if it were the will of God, that our Indian language might be sanctified by the translation of the Holy Scriptures into it." How striking and arresting is that phrase, that our "Indian language *might* be *sanctified* by the translation of the Holy Scriptures into it." Yet

every missionary who has been face to face with paganism realizes what this means. George Grenfell of the Congo, has this to say, "I find it very difficult to translate many of the ideas which are really of great importance. For instance, I can find no word for 'forgiveness,' and it has to be rendered by 'cleansing.' 'Sanctification' I have not ventured to grapple with yet. Of course, at the best, in these early days, a translation is only an approximation to what it ought to be, but if I can only manage to give the people an idea of the truth, I shall be very glad." Think of a language which has no word for "forgiveness," and in which "sanctification" represents an unheard-of idea! Yet such languages are to be found where the leaven of the gospel has not yet penetrated. Dr. F. E. Hoskins of the Beirut Mission, who labored for years in the preparation of the First Font Arabic Reference Bible has spoken of the attempt through the Arabic version to elevate and purify the Arabic language. That language is not a crude and undeveloped tongue. It has an immense vocabulary and is capable of great niceties of expression. Yet it has been so corrupted and defiled by the sins of those who use it that scarce a page of its dictionary could be read aloud to a mixed audience. And this redemption of words of which we have been speaking is found even in the Scriptures themselves. We have but to think, for example, of the word "love" (*agape*) of which a well known scholar has recently written that the redemption of the word was "the work of those who had learned of what love is from the divine revelation." "The love of God which passeth knowledge,"—that is a love which only the Christian can understand. Likewise the word "peace" (*eirene*), to the pagan Greek, this meant simply "absence of war and hostility." The Hebrew gave it its positive content of "well-being." But in the New Testament conception of the "peace of God that passeth all understanding" the word is fully sanctified and blessed.

It is, as we have seen, a fact that the Bible can be translated into languages the most diverse and the most widely distributed. We need not argue for the fact, we need not stress the difficulties, the fact has been abundantly demonstrated. And the reason for the fact is perfectly clear. Yet it is one which we need to keep ever in mind. The Bible is the "Word of God"; and "God has made of one flesh all nations of men for to dwell in all the earth." God's Word is meant for all, for all nations and kindreds and peoples, and tongues. It is able by the power of His Spirit to redeem and sanctify them; and it is, therefore, able to redeem and sanctify their several languages. We have no such promise for the wisdom of men, not even for the great works of literature. We might hesitate to attempt to translate Shakespeare into Eskimo, or Kant into Bantu. But we need not hesitate

to undertake to translate the Bible into any language, for the Bible has proved its power to sanctify all the languages of mankind. It is our duty, therefore, to give it to all as quickly, as fully, as accurately as possible. It is to this task that the great Bible Societies have devoted themselves. It is in this work that they have been richly blessed. And that they may devote themselves to it without let or hindrance, without dissipation of their energies or division of their forces, they make it their rule to do this "without note or comment," that the peoples of the earth may have this Bible in its simplicity and its purity.

In closing let us think of the concluding words of that prayer with which Adoniram Judson dedicated the Burmese Bible on its completion in 1834: "May He make His own inspired Word, now complete in the Burmese tongue, the grand instrument of filling all Burma with songs of praise to our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen." The aim of the Bible societies, the aim of the Christian missionaries, is to make this prayer all inclusive. When we can pray the prayer of Judson as he would have gladly prayed it, "May He make His own inspired Word, now complete in all languages and tongues, the grand instrument of filling all the world with songs of praise to our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."—the problems of Bible translation will have been solved and the work of translator and missionary will have been accomplished.

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## TRANSLATING IN THE MISKITO LANGUAGE OF CENTRAL AMERICA

THE REVEREND GEORGE R. HEATH, NICARAGUA

The Lamb who was slain for us has redeemed with His blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation; and there is no form of human speech which is not capable of becoming the vehicle of the glorious message of salvation. It is true that some languages are crude, and even debased, because for centuries they have been used for little less than earthly and sensual ideas: but, like those who speak them, they are capable of redemption. Very willingly would we missionaries share with our people the priceless heritage of noble psalmody and wholesome literature enshrined in our own language. But it is far more important to bring Christ as close to the people as possible, so that they may see that He is theirs as much as He is ours: that He will take their lives and purify and ennoble them without demanding the acquirement of any veneer of exotic culture. Until we do so, the Indian especially is liable to lead a double life, placing in one compartment the