

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. II.—THE BIBLE SOCIETY'S WORK, EARLIER AND LATER.

IT is felt by many friends of the Bible Society's work that the time is opportune for an effort to revive "the old Bible Society spirit."<sup>1</sup> This paper is a contribution towards that end. There is a sense in which we can never revive the spirit of the earlier years: there is a sense in which we can, and ought to do so. It is a duty as well as a comfort to distinguish between the possible and the impossible in this matter.

If we draw a line right across the Bible Society's history through the year 1851, it will divide it into two not very unequal parts; the earlier section is by ten years the longest, viz., forty-seven years—the later section is just thirty-seven.

How impossible it is for the children of the later half to understand, save by the help of reading and tradition, the feelings which dominated the minds of pious Christians in the Bible Society's earlier years.

A single illustration will make this clear. The foremost fact in the history of 1804—the year of the Society's foundation—was the proclamation of Napoleon, as Emperor of the French, and his preparation for the invasion of England. Every port on the Continent was closed against our commerce. A new armada was organized within three hours' sail of our coasts; the Continent was coming over as enemies. The foremost fact in 1851, the year through which the line is here drawn, was the Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace—the new temple, as men thought, of a golden age of peaceful trade. Every port everywhere was open; the Continent came over as friends. It is not possible in an age of peace to revive feelings that in every fibre felt the touch of the revolutionary time which brought forth, in 1804, the Emperor Napoleon.

Two high qualities—one of life, the other of godliness—were developed in those solemn early days. Resolve grew strong; Seriousness sank deep into the English mind. England did two things by God's help, and with God's blessing. Lord Nelson may stand for an example of one thing that she did, and, though less strikingly, Lord Teignmouth may stand for the other. She kept the keys of her house hanging at her own girdle, and went in and out in freedom to see what good she could do. England in those days spoke a large language. She lived, and she felt she lived, under the guidance of great men, in great times.

And thus sprung up a great religious energy, full of His

<sup>1</sup> The substance of this paper was read at a meeting of Bible Society workers and friends, held at the Bible House, on Thursday, May 2nd.

power, who was red in His apparel, and whose garments were like him that treadeth in the winefat: He came marching in the greatness of His strength, and men felt that He was mighty to save.

There was a second influence at work.

There came over the mind of Englishmen a great religious seriousness: sermons, poems, letters are full of seriousness. The word is not heard now. Men are earnest now: they were serious then.

To this fact contemporary literature bears faithful witness. The seriousness of those days is mirrored in the second book of Cowper's "Task." The later years of the last century were years of awful misery amongst the poor—of portentous calamity. Never had there been in human memory such repeated calamities; darkness literally covered Europe, and earthquakes and storms shook its very foundations. A few lines from Cowper will make all this vivid:

Sure there is need of social intercourse,  
Benevolence, and peace, and mutual aid  
Between the nations, in a world that seems  
To toll the death-bell of its own decease.

Then, having passed in review the unexampled calamities of the time, those great manifestations of force in nature, in her winds and in her mighty upheavals, those things which affect and overpower the senses, just as the manifestations of God's immediate presence overpower the soul, he adds that—

These are frowning signals, and bespeak  
Displeasure in His breast, who smites the earth  
Or heals it, makes it languish or rejoice;

and he concludes:

And 'tis but seemly that, when all deserve  
To stand exposed by common peccancy  
To what no few have felt, there should be peace,  
And brethren in calamity should love.

This is the kind of thing that sank into the heart of the very soundest part of the great English community. Their pulses beat to the movements of this poem. Their tears fell upon these pages; but they were not idle tears. They put down the book in serious energy, and went about doing good.

And so the Bible Society sprang up, as other and similar contemporaneous institutions did, out of a quickened fear of God and a quickened love of men. A single word describes the temper that created it—it was the type and embodiment of benevolence. The energy I spoke of, and the seriousness I spoke of, were steeped in penitential lowliness towards God and in well-wishing towards men. Men were *bene volentes*; and when there's a will there's a way.

So there rose up before men the idea, and then the institution of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

It was a very spontaneous movement. It needed no patronage, no fostering, and not much skill. No sooner was it ascertained that a great need of the Word of God existed, than there sprung up, as in a moment, a new machinery to supply that need.

Before the Society was a year old, it was plain that the fulness of time had come. Glasgow and London in 1805, Birmingham and Bath in 1806 held spontaneous meetings, without waiting for organizers or deputations. Wales, whose wants had really been the occasion of the foundation of the Society, contributed £1,900 the first year. It has never ceased to contribute largely. Yet there was no local secretary for sixteen years. All was spontaneous. The year 1809 was the first year in which regular auxiliaries were formed. How they sprang up! Reading, first, in March. Two days later, came Nottingham, with Newcastle as its twin sister. Then came Edinburgh in July, and East Lothian early in October. Leeds was organized before October was out. Exeter came in with December. Next year the North of England took up the work.

Systematic Christian work for women was the eldest daughter of the Bible Society. By 1819 it was estimated that ten thousand ladies were giving at least an hour a week to the systematic visitation of the dwellings of the poor. This they did, not only to see that the poor whom they visited were put in the way of becoming owners of the Book, which is especially the library of the poor, but, where it was possible, to make them partners in the work, and to collect their great littles for Jesus Christ's sake, so binding together in one body, in one catholic, Bible-reading, Bible-spreading community, the separated sections of English social and Christian life. Let me give a single typical illustration.

On the day after Christmas Day, 1817, the Liverpool Ladies' Branch was formed, with ten connected Associations which were organized in the following week. More than six hundred ladies undertook definite work in 341 districts. At the close of the first year the number of the subscribers exceeded 10,000, of whom 3,364 were free contributors, hoping for nothing again. More than 3,000 Bibles and Testaments had been distributed by sale, and the whole amount raised was £2,550, out of which the sum of £518 was sent to the parent Society as a free contribution.

I have not selected this instance because it is the best I could find. It is a fair specimen of what went on all over the country.

I have said that the spirit that worked in the workmen was

a hearty spontaneous spirit. It was also wonderfully widespread in its action. All ranks and conditions of men and women felt it.

In 1809 a few maid-servants in Aberdeen resolved to meet together and contribute a little in aid of the work. They formed themselves into the Aberdeen Female Servants' Society, and in their first year contributed £20.

Earlier still, in the Society's first year, a young lady in Sheffield, about fifteen years of age, agreed with a younger brother that he should contribute a halfpenny and she a penny a week towards a fund for procuring New Testaments for the poor. When they had saved sixteenpence, they bought their first copy. Then she drew up an appeal, and aimed at higher things. The little society contributed in one year £32 to the work.

In London, the Surrey Chapel Association, formed in 1812, came to the front. In eight years it raised £2,000. In the tenth year from the Society's foundation, its Juvenile Associations, spontaneously organized, were sending it £500 a year.

The generous influence passed across the seas. It touched the hearts of the best men everywhere. Henry Martyn's journals are full of enthusiasm for the Bible Society.

In January, 1808, he writes, "The Reports of the Bible Society are delightful;" and a few days later, "the Reports of the Bible Society, with which Mr. Brown has favoured us, have filled us all with wonder and delight." Two years later there are a couple of entries very characteristic: "May 18.—Calling at Colonel W.'s to-day, I had much discussion with some officers and ladies there on the amusements of the world. But I could produce nothing clear and convincing, perhaps because I had not prayed enough for assistance. Colonel W. consented to become a subscriber to the Bible Society." Five days after, he writes: "Breakfasted and dined with the General. He would not subscribe to the Bible Society, but offered a donation of £50, which I would not accept." That marks a high tide of Bible Society enthusiasm, a refusal of £50 because it was only a donation.

And one more reminiscence of Henry Martyn must find place, illustrative of this early Bible Society devotedness. It is an entry in the minute-book of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee, January 5, 1811, four days after Martyn had preached the sermon which founded the Calcutta Auxiliary, and three days before he left India for ever:

The Reverend Henry Martyn presents to the Committee, free of expense, a revised copy (prepared for the press) of the New Testament in Hindustani.

Every word of this brief record is eloquent of the old Bible

Society spirit. The five men, of whose transactions that is one minute, were George Udney, David Brown, Thomas Thomason, William Carey, and Joshua Marshman. Their names are in the book of Life. What makes these men so intensely interesting? I can find no better reason than that they were full of the old Bible Society spirit.

Then it is hardly possible to overstate the true catholicity of spirit to which the Bible Society was constantly ministering, and to which it has continued to minister.

Let me give a single illustration :

When Lord Shaftesbury presided over the special public meeting of this Society in the beginning of its jubilee year (1854), the first resolution was moved by the Bishop of Winchester (Sumner). It was seconded by the Rev. John Angell James. Both names are to us venerable, and are venerated. I dwell for a moment upon the Birmingham speech. Here is an extract: "I rise to second the resolution which has been moved with such chastened eloquence, such Christian piety, and in a spirit of such true catholicity, by the right rev. prelate, with whom I feel it to be an honour and a happiness to be associated in this 'work of faith and labour of love'—an association"—here is the point—"for which we are indebted to the Society which has brought us together on this platform. And I am sure that the right rev. prelate will agree with the sentiment which I now avow, that this is just as it should be, and as our Society exhibits it—the Churchman with the Dissenter, the Dissenter with the Churchman, and both together with the Bible—a position which is not altogether unlike that which was occupied by the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, with their faces towards each other, and both bending in lowly reverence towards the mercy-seat under the overshadowing of the cloud of the Divine presence." That certainly was beautifully said, and it was said after "forty-seven years" of delightful experience.

If there is any one thing that we more than any other need to revive, it is that catholicity of mind and heart, of which this venerable patriarch thus spoke on that day. The Bible Society was founded, no doubt, to spread the Bible, and not to promote Catholicity; but, if I may borrow once more from John Angell James, I would say that its sacrifice at the altar of truth has been so abundantly accepted, because it has sacrificed all the while at the altar of charity also.

Now, it is impossible to revive, even in the year of the great Eiffel Tower in Paris, the feelings which the French Revolution had produced in English hearts. That seriousness of which I spoke—which I can well picture to myself, for it was in its effect upon the mind like that indefinable something which we

used to see in India on the faces of men who had lived through the Mutiny—that we cannot have. Nor can we have that novelty of enjoyment, or, rather, that enjoyment of novelty, which was the peculiar sparkle in the cup of our predecessors. I borrow their own language to describe their feelings, as they surveyed their foreign work.<sup>1</sup> But listen also to the words of courage, of faith, of comfort, which blend with the record of their delight in their work, for they represent the very feelings which we have to cherish and, if needful, to revive :

Let our thoughts [they say] go back to the moment when, in a small apartment, and among a small company of persons, the thought was originated, "Why not a Bible Society for the world?" And then behold that thought carried out into effect and reality, to an extent even beyond the imagination and the hope of those in whose breasts it sprang up. Let us think of that little company, and that obscure chamber, and contrast them with the multitudes now assembled in this magnificent hall, besides the countless thousands throughout the earth, of every tribe, kindred and tongue under heaven, whose hearts all beat with high and holy delight in the one cause of sending abroad the sacred volume. And let the ascription of praise be heard: "Now unto Him who" not only "is able to do," but has actually done, "exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think; unto Him be glory in the Church of Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

And then, having thrown into sharp contrast the income, issues, and versions of 1804 and 1834, they review their mistakes, their difficulties, their reverses. "The Russian Bible Society, once the admiration of the world," had suspended its operations. Humiliation, perhaps, had been called for, correction administered; yet they say in words which we can adopt to-day, for one of them is the very text of this paper, "How wonderful still has been the preserving and *reviving* mercy of God!" Then, reverting once more to that heightened language than which no other even then seemed adequate to describe the Society's earlier history, they conclude: "The Society remains, although the enchantment of novelty has long since passed away, together with all that excitement derived from the extraordinary career the Society was permitted to run, when princes and potentates, prelates and dignitaries arose, touched by an invisible hand, and zealously promoted the work. Oh! what cause for thanksgiving, what ground for encouragement, does such a survey present! And, vast as the prospects of future labour unquestionably are, how does the retrospect forbid despondency, and call upon you to go on your way rejoicing!"

This passage describes admirably, I think, the old Bible Society spirit; and while we cannot restore "the enchantment of novelty," which even then, as you will have noticed, is spoken of as long since passed away, we can cherish the glowing delight

---

<sup>1</sup> End of Report, 1834.

with which our predecessors looked back upon the Society's earliest work, and though we live in colder and more critical times, we can ask ourselves why it is that this generation is not more moved at what it has pleased God to permit it to witness.

For it can be proved to demonstration that, with one or two brilliant exceptions, the solid achievements of the later period of this Society's work surpass, as well in intrinsic value as in vast extent, the missionary Bible-work of the earlier days.

I quoted just now some glowing words from the Report of 1834. At that time not a single version existed of the whole Bible in any one of the languages of the South Seas. Nott was putting the finishing touches to his manuscript, the work of twenty years. As a printed Bible the Tahiti Bible dates from 1838. In 1835 we read in the Report that "the Rev. Mr. Williams, of the London Missionary Society, has brought with him from the Island of Rarotogna (the name of the island is twice misspelt) a translation of the New Testament, in the language of a group of islands named Rarotogna." That group, during the past year, has become part of the British Empire. Fifty years of Bible missionary work have made it so. But this is *our* joy, not that of our fathers. Listen to another extract from the same Report: "The Rev. Mr. Yate, of the Church Missionary Society, has reached England, bringing the translation (of the New Testament into Maori) with him. Mr. Yate has furnished an interesting account of his labours, and the circumstances of the people for whose benefit they have been undertaken. . . . And your committee have engaged to defray the expense of printing 2,000 copies of the New Testament for their use." That 2,000 has since become 85,000. And looking at the South Seas as a whole, we have had part and lot in providing eight complete Bibles, four New Testaments, the four Gospels in two others, and portions of the holy Word in twelve. Our American brethren have, in addition, provided for the Sandwich Isles.

Turn to Africa, and include Madagascar. The entire history of the completed Malagasi Bible is comprised between 1835 and this present year.

Robert Moffatt's name appears in our documents for the first time, I believe, in 1837, thanking the Graham's Town Auxiliary for consenting to print the Gospel of St. Luke in "Sichuana." His work belongs to our period entirely. So does the Kaffir version. So, with a single exception, do all the West and East African versions.

The immense work going on in China is later still, and all of it belongs to the days since the Treaty of Nankin opened, in 1842, the five ports. The eighteen provinces are open now.

Let me add two suggestive words, and ask what our prede-



cessors would have felt and said if they could have pronounced as we can the two words "the Corea" and "Japan."

The Indian work would require a paper in itself. Think how in the old days money flowed to Serampore. This society alone sent over £30,000, and that was not all. Yet the work done then nearly all passed away, and except in South India, in the case of the Tamil, in which a most solid foundation was laid in the last century by our German brethren, and in North India in the case of Henry Martyn's Hindustani version, the really magnificent series of Indian Bibles belong to the Bible Society's later history.

I must pass away from details, though they are of the essence and substance of the question.

We are coming to know distinctly, and to estimate intelligently, what our work has to confront. We understand better than we did what is written in other sacred books than our own. Look at the learning that has been spent upon the Vedas. Pound them in a mortar, squeeze them in a press, can you from their quintessence construct a clear aspiration like "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me"? or a restful soliloquy founded upon well tried experience, "The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing"?

We have read "The Light of Asia," perhaps, and admired "The Great Renunciation," and we are now taught to believe that only at the lips of a half-clad mendicant can India receive a gospel. How long will this doctrine be fashionable? Buddhism as a system has perished out of its own birth-place, and only lives and reigns where it has turned its back upon itself. Nothing can live permanently that defrauds humanity. Gautama wore, and compelled his disciples to wear, a garb composed of strips. Our Lord wore a coat without a seam, which compelled the rough soldiers to exclaim "Let us not rend it!" The vestments of both are symbolical of the message they delivered. The one message is a message of degradation ending in death. The other "covers" man's defenceless head with the shadow of a Saviour's wing. The Buddha in a way was rich, and for his disciples' sakes became poor, and there the message ended, in poverty that was helpless to do aught but stupefy the finer feelings of the heart. Christ also was rich, and He became poor that men through His poverty might be made rich—rich in hope, in earnest expectation, in keen aliveness to the promise of life for evermore. Five hundred millions of men have been narcotized with Buddhism. From Ceylon north-eastwards to Japan, from Bali in the southern tropic to Baikal on the verge of Siberia the "wheels" of Buddhism have been turned. It was not till 1828 that the literature of Buddhism was unveiled. We know now with what we have to do. And the delightful discovery should be everywhere

announced that throughout all the Buddhist countries the Scriptures are available and intelligible, and that the Bible Society has brought them to the dwellings of men. Thus, as in India with the Hindus, so in Ceylon, in Burmah, in Nepal, in Tibet, in Mongolia, in Manchuria, in Japan, and through the length and breadth of China, the brooding Buddhist is called to awake and arise from the dead that Christ may give him light.

Then we face the Arabian. Him we have known of old. We have not yet done with him. Our very latest solitudes are on his account. We have encountered him on the banks of the Aruwimi; we are face to face with him on the equatorial lakes. Everywhere he is a scourge.

The children born of thee are sword and fire,  
Red ruin and the breaking up of laws.

For him, too, is the Gospel made plain. No slight is passed therein upon Abraham's seed. Only their pedigree is traced through Christ. The Arabic version with which our American brethren have enriched us is one of our chief treasures. What a harvest may some day spring from its incorruptible seed!

We surrender, then, the "enchantment of novelty," and the early stir of soul when wild revolution had its way abroad, and rampant infidelity mocked at all that was moral in men. Till similar perils return we cannot altogether feel as our fathers felt when they went out to "visit" Christ in His ignorant and downtrodden children, and to give them a Divine hope as the anchor of their soul. We have fallen on other times and other perils. Peace has its defeats as well as its victories, and in our days the bonds have been relaxed, which in times of more obvious peril bound together so graciously and so fruitfully the sundered servants of Christ.

Let us endeavour to revive the old Bible Society spirit. It was noble, free, spontaneous. It was widespread. It was catholic. It was full of faith, of bright anticipation. It grieved from afar the things which we see. It gave itself to hasten forward the accomplishment of these things. So the Holy Spirit wrought in their spirits and showed them what should come to pass. Now we have received "the same spirit," and, although in different circumstances from theirs, in altered times, in a more advanced stage of the work, we cannot altogether be as they, yet "a full heart and a full head"—a head that knows the extent of the Bible Society's accomplishments—and a heart that feels something of the joy called out by the splendid achievements of modern translators in bringing the Word of Peace to the intelligence of the many millions of mankind, are all that is needed to rekindle, by God's grace, the ancient glow and gladness that the Bible Society's work once evoked.

That work is the joint accomplishment of Churchmen and Dissenters, working together in one spirit, doing, and gaining thereby, incalculable good. The staff of Beauty was in the Society's hands and the staff Bands. It would be a calamity of the first magnitude if any declension of spirituality or fraternity should hinder the progress of the work or injure the gracious instrumentality by which, under God, it has been done. It would bode ill for the most successful instrumentalities if the barometer of Bible Society feeling were to sink permanently to a lower range.

W. J. EDMONDS.

NOTE.—A simple threefold table will illustrate the wonderful development of the Bible Society's work.

In the middle of 1819 the Rev. John Owen drew up in a simple table a few figures illustrative of the Society's growth in the first fifteen years of its career. It is a record of much interest, as well as a measuring line of much convenience. Here it is :

Expenditure 1804-1819, £704,840: an average of £47,000 a year.  
Circulation " 2,461,000: " 164,000 "

Now let the remainder of the Society's life be divided into four parts, from where Mr. Owen's figures end—say,

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| (1) From 1819, her Majesty's birth, to 1837, her Majesty's accession ... .. | } or 18 years; |
| (2) From 1837 to 1854, the year of the Society's Jubilee ... ..             |                |
| (3) From 1854 to 1869, the year of the Society's New House ... ..           | } or 15 years; |
| (4) From 1869 to 1887, the Queen's Jubilee ... ..                           |                |

—and let the expenditure and circulation of these four periods be compared with that of the first, and the result is approximately as follows :

In Mr. Owen's 15 years, an average expenditure of £47,000 a year.				
1819-1837	18	"	"	£90,000 "
1837-1854	17	"	"	£102,000 "
1854-1869	15	"	"	£165,000 "
1869-1887	18	"	"	£209,000 "

Turning from expenditure to circulation :

In Mr. Owen's 15 years, an average circulation of ... 164,000.				
1819-1837	18	"	"	... 435,000.
1837-1854	17	"	"	... 1,038,000.
1854-1869	15	"	"	... 2,000,000.
1869-1887	18	"	"	... 3,058,000.

In other words, we have been able to spend in the last period of eighteen years five times as much money; and for that money have effected a circulation of nineteen times as many copies as in the year of which Mr. Owen was the enraptured witness and the glowing chronicler.

Finally, let us look at the versions. Nothing in the documents of the Society needs such tender handling as its various lists of versions. In the early days of the work the home executive carried to excess the charitable grace of believing all things. Versions *in posse* were counted as if *in esse*; and the *posse* itself was often *non posse*. The year 1837 marks for us the line between the time of dreams that surpassed the facts, and the time.

of facts that have surpassed the fairy fabric of dreams. This paper has already in some degree dealt with that subject. Yet, in a sentence, there is something more to be said. In 1836 a circulation was claimed in 158 languages, or, if not an actual circulation, hopeful preparation at least was a-making. Then from the committee itself a man was raised up to chastise these figures and to weed the list. Russia and Serampore had furnished most of the lay figures. The list fell to 135. It was a bit of honest work that deserves warm praise. It was not till after the Jubilee, in 1854, that the list of versions came again within measurable distance of the list of 1836. Since then its progress has been alike wonderful for extent, for variety, and for influence. The entire history of the Christian Church may be ransacked to discover a second achievement worthy of being placed side by side with the Bible Society's work for the spread of the Bible.

---

### ART. III.—WONDER-WORKS.

I this infer,  
 That many things, having full reference  
 To one consent, may work contrariously ;  
 As many arrows, loosed several ways,  
 Fly to one mark ; as many ways meet in one town ;  
 As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea ;  
 As many lines close in the dial's centre ;  
 So may a thousand actions, once afoot,  
 End in one purpose, and be all well borne  
 Without defeat.

SHAKESPEARE, *Henry V.*, i. 2.

**B**Y Wonder-Works we mean those signs, powers, miracles which show that, besides the physical, there is a spiritual influence in the world, wherein the unresting activity of God, veiled behind the natural order of things, stands out as initiating new things, in new ways, for special purposes, rendering nature "a fairer and goodlier system than ever floated in airy romance before the eye of genius."

The manifestation of this spiritual influence will be twofold ; one in matter, one in manner. Both will intensify the signification of that variety in nature which exhibits wide and free changes, both in form and substance, for unwonted achievements. These achievements, the actual physical wonders, far transcend the imaginings of poetic minds. The reason of Newton and Galileo took a higher flight than the fancy of Milton or Dante.

The manifestation being twofold, so is the proof. It embraces the world as a whole, and pierces every part in particular ; gives uniformity to variety, and variety to uniformity. Thus, the forms of matter in the universe, the state of beings and existences, the amount of life in planets and stars, change instant by instant ; their path in space, the direction of forces acting on them, varies moment by moment ; out of this infinite