



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

THE REVISED BIBLE

From the "War Cry," May 30th, 1885

MY DEAR COMRADES,

The event of the past week in the world of books and religion – as I suppose some of you will be aware – has been the issue of the new translation of the Bible. Upon this work a goodly number of the fore-most scholars and divines of the age have been engaged during the last fifteen years.

The value of the result of their labours is now being considered, and has by some been pronounced to be considerable. It may be so. I have hardly had time to look into the Book, but from what little I have seen or it, I have gathered the notion that its chief service to the cause of religion will be that of a book of reference. I do not think it at all likely that the Revised volume will supplant our old friend the existing Bible; and that for two reasons:

First, there is no substantial difference of doctrine or fact between the two. This was what was to be expected. If there had been, it would have been a sad proof that for all these hundreds of years the people of God who have lived and died in the faith of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments had been seriously in error. This would have made Christianity a laughing-stock before the infidel and heathen nations of the earth.

And secondly, while no difference in the substance of the volume could be expected, it is well known that those who have produced this new Revision boast that one of its principal advantages consists in its being expressed in the same particular style and form of language as the present Bible.

In substance and form, therefore, the Book is much the same, and perhaps it is best that it should be so; although it is probable that had the arrangement of the Revision been left with me, I might, nay, I think I should have said – "While the substance is the same, we will express it as nearly as we can, not in the stiff and ancient language used three hundred years ago, but in that form of speech employed by the people of the present day."



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The value of the Bible as a book lies not in the words employed, but in the ideas conveyed by those words. And those words must therefore be the most desirable which most nearly convey the meaning of the inspired writers to those to whom they may be now addressed. For this reason, my comrades, I should very much like to see a Bible rendered into the English language as now spoken by English-speaking people throughout the world.

However, if the Revision throws any new light upon the Precious Volume – the BOOK OF BOOKS – I shall accept it very gratefully. Meanwhile, I am most interested just now in a further translation, for which either volume will serve. I want to see a new translation of the Bible into the hearts and conduct of living men and women. I want an improved translation – or transference it might be called – of the commandments and promises and teachings and influences of this Book to the minds and feelings and words and activities of the men and women who hold on to it and swear by it and declare it to be an inspired Book and the only authorized rule of life.

That seems to me to be the only translation, after all, that will in the long run prove to be of any value. It is the reproduction of the Scriptures in men and women that makes their worth. The Bible is a book intended to make Bible-men – that is, good men. If the end is not gained, where is the value of the means? What will be the value of the Bible in the day of judgment apart from the transformations of character it has produced. It is of no use making correct translations of words if we cannot get the WORDS TRANSLATED INTO LIFE.

Now I have a great deal of fault to find with the present living translations – in the men and women who represent the Bible in their daily walk to the world. There are, beyond controversy, several most erroneous readings, some most serious imperfections – a large number of glaring errors. In many cases the living translation is not only unlike the original Book, but in direct contradiction to it.

This leads to most serious consequences. One of the great arguments for all the trouble and labour of the new translation has been that an odd passage here and there has been incorrectly



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given, and that this has led to some heretical opinions. But oh, my God! what heresies, what infidelities, what dreadful ruination of souls - wholesale and retail - have arisen from the false representations of Bible truth made in the lives of so-called Christians.

In the living translation every man who bears the name of Christ says thereby, "My life is a representation of Christianity." If a Mahomedan and a Buddhist came to live in your house, or to be your next-door neighbours, and you had not read their sacred books or listened to the descriptions of their religion as given by their advocates, you would reckon from what you saw of those men that you knew what their religion was. You would say, "I know what Mahomedanism is, and I know what Buddhism is. I have not got it out of their books, but I have been privileged to see it lived out before my eyes." As you might very reasonably do with this heathen religion, so men do every day with regard to Christianity. And because these translations have been falsehoods and hypocrisies and shams, and altogether different from the originals, all manner of false and pernicious and damnable errors have crept abroad amongst men as to what real religion is. The translation and the revision have made it to appear a thing altogether unlike the original, and all manner of explanations and apologies are necessary to explain the glaring contradictions.

Now, my comrades, we must have a new translation. Every man and woman of us must set himself and herself to the task.

Supposing we have got now a Bible correct in the letter, printed in a book, the reproductions of the mind of God so far as He has declared it to some of His people in days gone by; let us now have some equally correct reproductions of the mind of Christ – some actual flesh-and-blood translations – some living epistles inspired and empowered by the Holy Ghost, that can be read and known of all men.

I mean, let us Salvationists live out before men lives on which God has written out in big heavenly words His own notions of truth and righteousness and purity and patience and love and sacrifice. Christians for generations now have been spending an enormous amount of strength upon the Bible. They have done well in that duty; but it seems to me that with regard



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to the sacred Book something very important still remains to be done. Christian scholars have translated it again. They have commented and printed and published it in every form, and it is hurrying on to encompass the world with its revelations in every tongue. They have explained and preached about almost every word within its covers. There seems to me only one thing left to be done with it, and that is to give us a literal and faithful and understandable translation of it IN PRACTICE. Let us live it; live the real thing – live the Christ-life.

Such a translation, my comrades, will tell. It will be victorious. It will be triumphant.

This is possible. It does not require learned divines and scholarly men to accomplish it. Way-faring men, though fools, can make this translation, and fifteen years' perseverance in it will, I have not the shadow of a doubt, go a long way towards bringing in the millennium.

I must have another word on some of the false translations above referred to, and be a little more particular on the new revision still required next week.

Yours engaged on the new translation,

WILLIAM BOOTH.
May 26th, 1885.