

yours. They crossed the river before you bridged it. They climbed the mountain before you tunnelled it. They civilized the island before it was annexed. They let light into the Dark Continent before it was partitioned. The fingers that gathered the tea-tips and cotton-pods fingered our Bibles before your traders arrived for the bales and boxes. The hands that gathered the mulberry leaves and the palm dates handled our Bibles while the silkworms spun, and the living word remained when the casual trader had borne off the harvest.

Your mercantile metropolis is the great model of material success, and success, like charity, covers a multitude of sins. Your success is the legitimate result of energy and enterprise. The calves of the city's idol are not Gog and Magog, but enterprise and energy. The Society which you honour to-day has achieved in a higher sphere a success as brilliant as your own, by energy as indomitable, and enterprise as resolute and far-reaching. Your energy and enterprise are largely concentrated here, and your force is centripetal on other centres and satellites of industrial enterprise.

The Bible Society is *British and Foreign*. Called into existence by a bitter cry from Wales, it supplied the immediate wants of the Principality, of the Gaels in Scotland, of the Irish, and of the English-speaking people throughout the world. Thirty thousand French and Spanish soldiers were then English prisoners of war, and the Society promptly made good its title as *foreign* by providing for them in their own tongue an ample supply of the word of God.

But the Society had wider foreign aims. The vast Empire of China, with its hundreds of millions of immortal souls, was wholly without the Bible. China became the committee's concern at their earliest meetings, and versions have been provided in the great literary script, in the widely spoken Mandarin, and in ten of the local languages. China is still the committee's concern, and at their request, conveyed last year to the Shanghai Conference by the humble individual who now addresses you, the missionaries agreed unanimously to set apart their ablest scholars to produce standard versions in the chief languages of China.

In Asia, the cradle of our race, the birthplace of our religion, the homeland of Jesus, there were only two pre-Reformation versions of the Scriptures alive. These were Arabic and Persian. Even they were obsolete and moribund, and existed in rare MSS. which were seldom read. The living church had gone forth with the living word in that land; but the church had fallen from her early zeal, and she slumbered with some dead versions in her nerveless grasp. Syriac and Armenian and Georgian remained splendid but lifeless monuments of the church's early faith and vital energy. After eighty-seven years of ceaseless labour there are now one hundred and thirteen living versions, instead of two, in the languages and dialects of Asia.

There was no living version of the Scriptures in any African language. The Coptic and Ethiopic had died without giving birth to successors. The land of Ham was dark and uncared for, except by the slave-catcher, who found it a happy hunting ground. The people were sheep without a shepherd, and no man cared for their souls. There are now sixty versions of the Scriptures in African languages, and the light of heaven is breaking through the Egyptian darkness.

The tribes of America were without the Bible. The last of the Mohicans who read Eliot's translation had passed away, and Eliot's Indian Bible remained a curiosity, no man understanding its speech. There are now forty versions of the Scriptures in the native languages of America.

How did the matter stand with Oceania? Eighteen centuries of the Christian era had flown, and the Gospel had never sounded in any language of the islands. Among all the heterogeneous peoples of those scattered and sweltering islands there was not one scrap of the word of God. "Surely the Isles shall wait for me," sang the prophet of old; and the islanders have now forty versions that tell them "God is love."