

William D. Reynolds, "How We Translated the Bible into Korean," Union Seminary Magazine 22 (1910-11), 292-303.

*Punyuk ta toyusso* was the message flashed over the wires from the Chunju section of the Board of Official Translators of the Scriptures Saturday evening, April 2nd, 1910, announcing to the Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society at Seoul, Korea, the glad tidings that the task of translating the whole Bible into the Korean language had been completed. True, some finishing touches were yet to be put to the work in the way of careful copying and rapid revision of certain manuscripts in preparation for the press; but the terse telegram, costing only five cents, accurately expressed the fact: "Translation all done." Not quite twenty-five years had elapsed since the landing of the first ordained Protestant missionaries, just twenty-three years since the organization of the first Bible Committee, about thirteen years since the reorganized Board began joint work upon the New Testament, and precisely five years, five months and sixteen days from start to finish upon the translation of the Old Testament.

Beginning our story at the end, as Korean books seem to do, and taking the last word of our subject first, as the Korean language has a way of doing, a few words about Korean as a language may prove not uninteresting as preliminary to the larger subject.

The origin of the Korean language, like that of the "twenty million brethren of one birth" who speak it, is lost in the dim mists of prehistoric times. There is a hoary tradition that 4,000 years ago a semi-mythical hero named Tangun, sprung from the union of a spirit with a virgin, was hailed by the barbarous people as king, taught them the topknot style of hairdressing <292/293> in vogue today, and gave his country the name "Cho-Sun," morning freshness, which has been revived by the Japanese since their annexation of Korea. The story of his supernatural birth reads like a faint echo of Gen. 6: 2, or a vague prophecy of Matt. 1: 23.

How many modifications the language has undergone down through these forty centuries, no one knows. Although philologically allied to Japanese in grammar and order of words, and indebted to Chinese for ideographs and thousands of imported words, Korean is yet totally distinct from both. Korean might almost be called a double language, so widely do the colloquial and the literary style differ in terminations and phraseology. The noun rejoices in nine distinct cases: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative, Vocative, Ablative, Instrumental, Locative, and Appositive, besides the simple uninflected form of the word which is often used when the meaning is clear.

The Ablative, Instrumental or Appositive ending can be tacked on to the Dative; the Ablative or Appositive to the Instrumental. And, *mirable dictu*, even such combinations are possible as the Dative, Instrumental, Ablative and Appositive or the Instrumental, Ablative and Appositive endings all affixed to one noun stem. Summing up all these "permutations and combinations," we find a total of seventeen possible variations of the noun.

Coming to the verb, there are said to be as many as one thousand possible variations! Yet there is no inflection for number and person, no Infinitive, Subjunctive, or Optative Mood, no Middle or Passive Voice; no distinct Conjugations, and very few irregular verbs are to be found. But there are two verbal nouns, two verbal participles, and four adjectival participles, the latter completely taking the place of the relative clause, there being no trace of a relative pronoun in Korean. Although destitute of

inflections to indicate number and person, the Korean verb is rich beyond our wildest dreams in terminations indicative of the relative rank or age of the persons speaking, spoken to, and spoken of. Thus, there are eight forms meaning "I go"; eight forms meaning "go there," etc., from which the proper one must be selected according to <293/294> relative age or social standing. And in the case of many common actions like "eating ... sleeping," "walking ... talking," etc., not only the ending but the word itself must be changed in obedience to the inexorable laws of etiquette. Besides this elaborate system of honorifics, the Korean verb is inflected to express personal experience, hearsay, probability, doubt, desire, intention, causation, concession, condition, interrogation, exclamation, indirect discourse, etc., etc., making the study of the language highly interesting to a Westerner.

The written language is over-rich in script, possessing three varieties: the Chinese ideographs, to the mastery of which the school-boy devotes ten or fifteen years; the Unmun, or native alphabet, so easy that it is despised as unworthy of a scholar's attention; and mixed script, in which the nouns and verbs are put in the Chinese character for vividness, while the endings appear in the native alphabet for definiteness. The Scriptures and publications of the Korean Religious Tract Society have been issued in the easy native script for the most part; but there are also editions of the New Testament and advanced textbooks in the mixed script. From the beginnings of Mission work in Korea, tracts and Scriptures have been imported from China for the benefit of the literati, who read them readily.

The Korean alphabet was invented 1445 A. D. It consists of fourteen consonants and eleven vowels, perfectly adapted to represent every sound in the Korean language. It lacks c, f, q, v, w, x, y, z, ph, th; b, d, g, are represented by doubling p, t and k. Words are always written syllabically, each syllable being a group of two, three, or at most four letters. Such combinations as bridge, stove, strength are unspellable and unpronounceable. Syllables were spaced, not words, resulting in a drawling, singsong, unnatural style of reading. Foreigners have introduced word spacing and natural reading, but to one well versed in the vernacular the former is unnecessary, and the latter lacks the picturesque musical quality of the oriental recitative. The first time we heard it was at family prayers, when a scholar of the old school volunteered to read the Scripture for us-it nearly "broke up the meeting!" <294/295>

Coming at length by this rather round about way to our subject, Bible Translation, it has been found convenient to treat it under four heads: the history, methods, difficulties and rewards of the work.

I. THE HISTORY of the attempt to give the Koreans the Word of God in their own tongue falls easily into four periods:

1. Efforts from without the Hermit Nation, 1865-1887.
2. Individual versions by various missionaries, 1887-1898.
3. Production of the Official Board's Version of the New Testament, 1897-1904.
4. Authorized Translation of the Old Testament, 1904-1910.

1. Efforts to provide the Koreans with the Scriptures were made from China on the West, Manchuria on the North, and Japan on the East, before Protestant missionaries were allowed to enter the country. Mr. Hugh Miller, the able Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, says: "As far as we know, Bibles were first brought to Korea in 1865, under the direction of the National Bible Society of Scotland, by the Rev.

Mr. Thomas. He came from Chefoo in a Korean junk. In the following year, he came over in the ill-fated 'Sherman.' The ship was stranded near Pyeng Yang, and both he and the crew were killed by the Koreans.

"In 1875 [1877] Dr. John Ross and Rev. John McIntyre, of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, who were working in Manchuria, came into contact with Koreans who had gone across the border for business purposes. These missionaries learned that Koreans could read and understand the Chinese translation of the Scriptures. A scholarly Korean was engaged to make a translation from the Chinese into the Unmun, the vernacular language of Korea, under the direction of Dr. Ross and Mr. McIntyre.

"In 1882 editions of the Gospels of St. Luke and St. John were published, but it was difficult to circulate them in Korea, Books of a foreign religion were not allowed to come into the Hermit Kingdom, and now that the books were printed the problem was how to get them into the country. Korea merchants went to Mukden periodically to buy the old official papers which were offered for sale, and brought into Korea on <295/296> the backs of coolies. The suggestion came to Dr. Ross and Mr. McIntyre that if the Scriptures were made up into bundles, unbound, they might be carried into the country without detection. It was in this manner that God's Word in Korean was first introduced into the country.

"At this time efforts to introduce God's Word into Korea were also being made in the East. In 1884, Rev. Henry Loomis, Agent of the American Bible Society in Yokohama, met a Korean in Japan named Rijutei (Ye Su Chon in Korean), and had him translate the Gospel of St. Mark into his native tongue. When the American missionaries, Revs. H. G. Underwood, H. G. Appenzeller and W. B. Scranton passed through Japan, they were given a few copies of St. Mark's Gospel in Korean, which they had in their hands when they landed at Chemulpo in 1885. This was one of the few cases in the history of Missions where the missionaries reached the country in which they were to labor, carrying with them God's Word in the language of the people.

"But it was the Ross translation which laid the foundation of the work in Korea. Between 1883 and 1886 no less than 15,690 copies of this translation were circulated in Korea through three colporteurs. From the beginning of the work of Saw the colporteurs was very successful. Dr. Ross writes that the first congregation of Korean converts were almost entirely those led to Christ by Saw. The Ross Version of the New Testament was completed and published in 1887. It was thus the circulation of God's Word which introduced Christianity into the Hermit Kingdom; and it is recognized that the wonderful progress of the Gospel in Northern Korea is due in no small measure to the seed sowing of those early days. It is worthy of note that today in the city of Weju there is a strong church of 1,500 believers with no missionary resident in the city."

The Ross and Rijutei Versions were of necessity almost wholly the work of Korean scholars, being simply their translations from the Chinese and Japanese Bibles, without the benefit of adequate revision by a foreigner well versed in Korean. However grateful we shall always feel for these pioneer attempts, their stilted, awkward style, abounding in Chinesisms and provincial expressions, with frequent errors, obscure renderings, <296/7> queer spellings, and archaic type, caused the early Korean missionaries to resolve to make a new translation rather than waste time patching up the old.

2. Individual versions by various missionaries, 1887-1898. Early in 1887 the five missionaries then on the field organized themselves into a Bible Committee "in charge of the translation, conservation ' and publication of the Scriptures in Korea." Various books of the New Testament were assigned to be translated separately by four men, two of them clerical and two of them medical missionaries; viz.: Revs. Underwood and Appenzeller, and Drs. Heron and Scranton. After Dr. Heron's death in 1890, Rev. Jas. S. Gale was added to the Committee. By the end of 1892 individual versions of about two-thirds of the New Testament were ready for press, and were published in separate portions by the British and Foreign Bible Society during the next few years. About the same time the Rev. M. C. Fenwick published a limited edition of St. John with Chinese and Korean in parallel columns.

In 1898 Mr. A. A. Pieters, of the American Bible Society, translated selections from the Book of Psalms, which were eagerly welcomed by the Korean church.

From time to time, the Translators' individual drafts of various Epistles were published in limited editions. And of the first edition of the complete New Testament published in 1900, 1 Corinthians to the Revelation inclusive were individual drafts. "This was an occasion of great rejoicing. A public thanksgiving service was held in the capital. The British and American ministers, representative missionaries from all parts, and the Agents of the American and British Bible Societies were present; specially bound copies of the New Testament were presented to the translators and their assistants."

3. Production of the Official Board's Version of the New Testament, 1897-1904. To go back a few years, in 1893 the constitution of the Bible Committee had been changed and a Board of Official Translators elected; viz.: H. G. Underwood and Jas. S. Gale of the Presbyterian Mission, North, H. G. Appenzeller and W. B. Scranton of the Methodist Mission, <297/8> North, and Mr. Trollope of the Church of England Mission. The latter's connection with the Board was but temporary. In the fall of 1895, W. D. Reynolds of the Southern Presbyterian Mission was added to the Board. At first the various members of the Board worked separately, preparing first drafts and circulating them for criticism. From 1897 on, daily sessions were held for a month or two in the spring and fall, so that by 1900 the Board's Version had been completed through the Book of Romans. So great was the clamor of the community for the whole New Testament in one volume, that the Board reluctantly consented to the publication of the provisional edition mentioned above. As it was thought this edition of the New Testament would supply the demand for several years, the Board now turned its attention to the Old Testament and took up the Psalms first. But not one-third of the Psalms had been translated when the furloughs of four out of the five members put a stop to Board meetings for nearly two years.

In June, 1902 the Board of Translators and the cause of Missions sustained a sad loss in the death of Rev. H. G. Appenzeller, the pioneer of the M. E. Mission, who went , down with the Kumagawa Maru in a collision at sea, when on his way to attend a meeting of the Board at Mokpo. Another pioneer member of both that Mission and the Board, Dr. W. B. Scranton, was detained indefinitely in the United States.

This left only two members of the' Board resident in Seoul, Drs. Gale and Underwood; and the constitution required three votes to be cast for the passage of a manuscript. Hence something had to be done to secure continuous Board Sessions. Negotiations were opened between the Bible Societies and the Southern Presbyterian Mission, as a result of which Mr. Reynolds (who had been a member of the Board since

1895, but had been engaged in Mission work at Chunju since 1897, making spring and fall trips to the capital to attend sessions of the Translating Board) was sent back to Seoul to give his whole time to Bible Translation, his salary to be paid by the Bible Societies. At the same time pressure was brought to bear upon the Northern Presbyterian Mission to assign Drs. Underwood and Gale Bible Translation as their chief work, "no other form <298/299> of Mission work to be allowed to interfere with Sessions of the Board."

Rev. G. H. Jones, Ph. D., of the M. E. Mission, was elected to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Appenzeller's death, but met with the Board for only six months. The new arrangements worked admirably, and inside of two years the Board had completed its authorized version of the New Testament, which was printed in 1904, put through a rapid revision and re-issued in permanent form in 1906.

4. The translation of the Old Testament was taken up *de novo* in October 1904. The Psalms and part of Genesis had been translated in daily sessions when Dr. Underwood's health gave way, necessitating a complete rest and absence from the field for several years. Dr. Gale's furlough falling due, Mr. Reynolds was left alone to carry on the work with native assistants. To comply with the letter of the law requiring three votes to be cast, the Bible Committee elected two native assistants full members of the Board. In the fall of 1906, Rev. A. A. Pieters and W. G. Cram were also elected, but the demands of their itinerating work prevented their serving for more than a few months.

In the spring of 1907, Dr. Fox of the American Bible Society, and Mr. Ritson of the British and Foreign Bible Society visited Korea at the same time, and after conference with the Bible Committee authorized Mr. Reynolds with the two Korean members of the Board to proceed with the translation of the Old Testament.

The death of Rev. W. M. Junkin at Chunju, January 2, 1908, caused his Mission to recall Mr. Reynolds to Chunju to fill the vacancy in the evangelistic work, with the express understanding, however, that he should give the same amount of time to Bible Translation as while living in Seoul. The two Koreans who accompanied him to Chunju and shared the toil of completing the Old Testament were Ye Sung Tu and Kim Chung Sam. The only Book of the Bible untouched by Dr. Reynolds was Jeremiah, which was translated by Dr. Gale and revised by Dr. Underwood. April 2, 1910, at 5 P. M. the last verse was translated, and with a strange commingling of sacred emotion <299/300> over having been spared to finish the task of translating the Bible, and the hilarious joy of a schoolboy when vacation comes, the Chunju section of the Board of Translators adjourned with a prayer of heartfelt thanksgiving.

II. METHODS OF WORK. The first plan adopted in 1887 was to have one set of missionaries translate and another set revise their translations. In 1893 this plan was discarded, and the Official Translators circulated their first drafts for mutual criticism, made a second draft on the basis of these criticisms, and then called a meeting of the Board in daily sessions for final discussion and vote verse by verse. This plan, while ideal, proved so tedious that the second stage was eliminated, and the Board began revising first drafts, usually appointing one member to run over the portion for the next day's grind and put it in the best possible form. The Secretary read the translation aloud, verse by verse. If a verse met with no comments it became the official version of the Board. If challenged, as was usually the case, discussion ensued, lexicons and commentaries were consulted, renderings in Japanese and Chinese versions, in Latin,

French, German, and for a while Russian, were compared and a vote finally taken, the rendering preferred by the majority becoming the official version. In the more difficult passages of Paul's Epistles sometimes a whole morning would be spent on two or three verses. At the opposite extreme were the easy narrative passages in the Old Testament, where the day's work sometimes covered over one hundred verses.

After the corrections had all been made, the page usually presented the appearance of hen-scratchings. Two neat copies had then to be made and carefully verified, one for the printer, and one for preservation. Finally, proof had to be read, once, twice, and sometimes thrice before the page could be "O. Ked" to print.

III. DIFFICULTIES. These varied with the nationality of the workers-American, Korean and Japanese. The American Translators found it difficult to give the necessary time to translation, while the evangelistic work clamored so urgently for attention, and held out such alluring promises-not to speak of the interruptions due to house building, committee <300/301> meetings, Mission meetings, calls, teaching in school, Bible Training Classes, and Theological Seminary. They found it hard to get at the precise meaning of obscure passages, and to find adequate renderings for the-polished niceties of the Greek or the figurative expression<sup>2</sup> of the Hebrew idiom. Passages like the ceremonial law, the elaborate instructions for building the Tabernacle, the description of the Temple, Isaiah's prophetic flight, Ezekiel's visions, made the translator's brain reel and his eye grow dim, and an attack of nervous prostration was narrowly averted. The task of translating the thousands of Scripture names took three weeks of the Board's time, and then proved unsatisfactory. Words with pagan ideas had to be converted and baptized so to speak; e. g. "sin" was not sin till found out, the Korean word really meaning "crime"; "God" was confounded with the blue sky; "love" was the feeling of a superior for an inferior, so that though God might "love" us, we could not be said to "love" God. Such words as "atonement," "justification," etc. had to be coined by combining certain Chinese characters, or making a circumlocution in the vernacular.

The Korean Assistant's difficulties were such as coming on time, keeping awake, grasping the meaning, selecting the proper synonym, protecting his native language from violent distortion at the foreigner's hands, copying accurately, spacing-and spelling according to rule, when "any old way would do." Time and again the copyist would leave out whole verses, his eye being caught by the same word occurring a few columns further on. Bribing, coaxing, scolding, proved of no avail. The price of accuracy was eternal vigilance on the part of the foreigner.

The Japanese typesetter's difficulties arose from the close resemblance between certain syllables in Korean manuscript. The edition of 1904 was rendered almost worse than useless by the presence of hundreds of typographical errors, which though slight in appearance either changed the sense or made nonsense. The famous rendering in an early English version of Gen. 3: 7, "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves *breeches*," which won for that edition the nickname "Breeches Bible," found a parallel in the Korean reading "Paul, following the daughter of God," instead of "Paul, and Apostle according to the will of God!" The Japanese typesetter had substituted the Korean syllable *dal* for *dut*, and the proofreader, not a Translator, had failed to detect the error. The Board had to spend two weeks making out a list of errata to insert at the back of that edition, and the rule was passed that in future editions proof must be carefully read by some member of the Board.

IV. REWARDS. In the early days when the Translators were hampered by an unworkable plan of operations, the reward liberally dealt out by an impatient community clamoring for Scriptures, was such remarks as: "at this rate we shan't have the whole Bible for forty years!" "Why don't you fellows get a move on you?" "I don't see anything so very hard in translation," etc., etc. As a matter of fact, despite loss of time from furloughs and long intervals between meetings in the earlier stages of the work, the Board's Official Version of the New Testament was completed in seven and one-half years from the time it began joint work in daily sessions upon Matthew; and the Old Testament took about five and a half years.

Now that the task is completed the Translators would be less, or more, than human not to feel gratified at such expressions as the following from "Korea for Christ": "In the preparation of the entire Bible for the Korean Church, a great debt of gratitude is due to a number of men who have labored unceasingly in its production." Or this extract from a letter of the Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society: "I am exceedingly glad that you have been able to complete this work; and the thanks of the whole missionary constituency is due you and your Mission."

But apart from and above all such gratifying expressions is the reward of a happy consciousness of having done something to give the Word of God to a people so glad to get it and so fond of reading and studying the Bible. Dr. Gale says in his delightful book, "Korea in Transition," "The writer counts it among his choicest privileges that he has had a share in its translation." <302/303>

And best reward of all, when the King's servants—preachers, teachers, doctors, nurses, translators, who have labored together to bring Korea to Christ—stand before their Lord and say: "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do," mayhap our Lord will say to us, too, "Well done, good and faithful servants, ye have been faithful over a few things; I will make you rulers over many things: enter ye into the joy of your Lord."