

SOUNDING BRASS OR TINKLING CYMBAL

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." St. Paul, we read you loud and clear! Or do we? Do we perhaps "see through a glass, darkly" as St. Paul suggests in a later verse of this same letter ~~to the Corinthians?~~

Of all the books of the Bible only the Torah won more immediate acceptance as theological and dogmatic authority than the epistles of Paul. Nevertheless, some years elapsed after his martyrdom before even Greek texts of his writings achieved general circulation and nineteen centuries have elapsed without definitely sorting the bona fide from the apocryphal. Although no holograph scriptures are known to exist, most of the New Testament is believed to have been written in Greek, the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean, and ever since the process of translation into every known language has been continuous. However, the need for periodic re-translation has not always been recognized, as the changes in a language are so gradual and so subtle that one forgets that ~~the plural of premise has become as rare~~ ^{what the jazz age called "hot" is now called} "cool" and the beatniks call it "crazy". ~~as the singular of premises.~~

^{while sharing his desert hermitage with a lion,}
In the fourth century St. Jerome made the first complete translation of the Bible into Latin which was called the Vulgate and is still the authorized version of the Roman Catholic Church. Its most famous edition is, of course, the Gutenberg Bible. A spate of English translations followed John Wycliff's of 1382, culminating in the Douay, or Catholic, version of 1582 and the King James, or Protestant version of 1611. The King James was based on mediaeval Greek manuscripts edited by Erasmus "with former translations diligently compared" and its majestic prose suggests that almost

equal consideration was given to cadence and rhythm. Almost 300 years later this was reexamined and put into the form in which it is now known as the "Authorised Revised Standard Version". Three years ago the University Presses of Oxford & Cambridge published a new translation of the New Testament - a product of thirteen years of research by the scholars of all the major protestant denominations in England. A literary achievement, ^{but} ~~and~~ an ecumenical triumph!

Twenty years after Mohamed's death the canonical text of the Koran was established and all other versions of the Prophets revelations were destroyed, thus leaving no doubts or questions of text. Neither has it been found necessary to tamper with the text of the Gettysburg address, or Hamlet, or the Jumping Frog of Calivaris County. What, then, has caused so universal and continuous a compulsion to revise, refire, amend, correct or purify the Bible? Of course so vast and essentially predisposed a public would make any editor's mouth water; to the fundamentalist its finest shades of meaning have far-reaching consequences; ^{in the days} when heresy paid so handsomely it was, naturally, important to the Inquisition to define it; above all, lingering obscurities gradually become cleared up to increase comprehension and, beyond that, faith.

Not only have much earlier, and presumably more exact, Greek texts been discovered than were available to Erasmus and his followers, but scholars now have a more complete understanding of first century Greek idiom. If changes in English have warranted a new edition of the dictionary after twenty-seven years there must be thirteen times as many changes ^{needed} in the Bible after 350 years. Obviously, as sources get older and current languages metamorphose, the gap between them widens. One

such semantic evolution started with the Greek word *agapē* - the greatest of virtues, as Paul tells us. St. Jerome translated this into Latin as "*caritas*". From this to "*cara*" in Italian, "*chère*" in French, and "*charity*" in English was a step that was easily taken by Richard Taverner, with his poetic elizabethan ear, in his translation of 1529. Eight years earlier Martin Luther, had rendered *agapē* as love. Could it have been at this point in his translation that he threw the ink-well at the devil? Anyone who was clever enough to pick hallow'een as the time to nail his 95 theses to the church door could be trusted to know the difference between love and charity.

The word "*charity*" appears 21 times in the New Testament of both the Douay and the King James versions and not once in the Old Testament. Both the Revised Standard of 1881 and the New English Bible of 1961 have eliminated "*charity*" entirely and translate *agapē* as "*love*". Perhaps an examination of what Paul has to say about "*agapē*" will clear things up between "*charity*" and "*love*". Quotations, except as noted, are from the King James and the New English versions of the thirteenth chapter, first Corinthians, Verses 3 to 7.

"Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing". In the eyes of the Internal Revenue Service this is a contradiction in terms. It is also a punishable offense if enough goods aren't saved to pay the tax after the allowable deductions have been taken.

The new version: "I may dole out all I possess . . . but if I have no love I am none the better" refers neither to Foreign Aid nor to Barbara Hutton but rather to such men as Frederick Law Olmsted, primarily known to fame, of course, as an

unwitting accomplice in the most imperishable hoax of the Chicago Literary Club and secondarily as the designer of the country's most distinguished city parks.

Less well known, are his life-saving achievements during the Civil War as unpaid Secretary General of the United States Sanitary Commission. This was a privately directed and financed amalgamation of local relief organizations which pooled and utilized an endless variety of civilian skills and talents, from fund-raising - \$25,000,000 in four years - to reorganization of the Army Medical Bureau. Building on the experience of the similar British group in the Crimean War, Mr. Olmsted and his commission saved untold thousands of lives by their inspections of camps and hospitals to correct defects of diet, ventilation, water supply, drainage, sanitation and even nursing and surgical practices. As in the subsequent U.S.O. and Red Cross, help was given in every phase and facet of soldiers problems, from food and lodging ~~for~~ ^{for} soldiers on leave, to hospital directories and assistance in collecting benefits due; but most importantly "it gave to thousands of civilians a sense of purpose and participation in the struggle for the Union."

"Charity suffereth long and is kind". Does this square with the instant charity, all pre-mixed and seasoned for every taste and ready to dissolve in cash, of the Community Chest? Efficiency, sound business practice, and the current preoccupation with leisure time suggest that each of us stick to our own trade and so earn more in order to give more and let dispassionate experts, or even more dispassionate computers, decide where our contribution can relieve pain and poverty most effectively.

To the advantages of this scheme can be added the simplicity of creating a single "image" ^{to say nothing of} ~~and~~ the obvious merchandising aid of installment buying in the form of which has been defined as "that branch of the art of lying which consists in very nearly deceiving your friends without quite deceiving your enemies"

pledges. It lacks only the therapy of involvement.

"Love is patient", the new version, ^{is probably best illustrated by the writings of} ~~was perhaps most clearly, though unwittingly,~~
~~interpreted by~~ the twelfth century rabbi, Maimonides, ^{who} ~~when he~~ said, "Anticipate need by preventing poverty; assist the reduced fellow man either by a considerable gift or a sum of money, or by teaching him a trade, or by putting him in the way of business, so that he may earn an honest livelihood and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity".

"Charity envieth not". Doth it not, indeed? Not even behind the scenes at a fashion show when the Dior creation hangs like a shroud on the chairman's daughter and it is persistently rumored that old horse-face was allowed to model the mink stole less as a reward for her dexterity with mop or bed-pan than to cover her acne? Consider the seating arrangements at a hundred-dollar-a-plate dinner and say whether "charity envieth not".

On a visit to Russia in 1906 Ernst Barlach declared he had found "humanity not yet overlaid with civilization". Last summer I discovered what he meant when I traveled by local bus along the southern edge of the Sahara. The antique bus careened out of Gao at top speed, wheezing and groaning a bit under its load of black humanity and simple, but cherished clutter. In the middle of the bus a wire screen divided the first from the second class, the difference being that in the former no adult had to sit on another passenger's lap and the kammeraderie was less boisterous by several decibels. Just before a sunset sufficiently spectacular to be commonplace on the desert, the bus stopped and all the men got out. How tactful and considerate

of the driver I thought, as I looked for the bushes, of which there were none. Too late I discovered that this was a stop for prayers. On we drove through the dark over a barely discernable road when suddenly a few twinkling lanterns indicated a hamlet where we were to stop for supper and the night. Each lantern illuminated a table presided over by a bandit with whom one haggled for such goodies as mealies and boiling hot, sickly sweet coffee. Before the last belch broke the evening stillness, straw mats or cotton shawls were spread on the gravelly ground beside the road and the travellers lay down en masse to "knit the ravelled sleeve of care". Not having been forewarned of this program, I looked about for a softer bed and found what appeared to be ideal - a spreading tree surrounded by a carpet of grass, and it was unoccupied! My first class companions had paid no attention to me but before I could even settle down in my sylvan bide-a-wee, a teen-age boy from the masses in the rear of the bus ran over and grabbed me. Quite unceremoniously he pulled me away from the tree while jabbering and gesticulating excitedly. I couldn't understand a word he said but got enough of an impression of things lurking, crawling or slithering to be convinced. Realizing my total unpreparedness for a night ~~at~~ fresco, he simply spread out his cotton shawl instead of rolling up in it and invited me to share it. Lying on the roadside looking up at a clear African sky full to overflowing of stars was certainly a time for ponderous, cosmic thoughts, ready-made for transmittal to any audience not in a position to talk back. Instead, I fell asleep at once - probably snoring like my neighbors - without realizing that my young friend (who disappeared when we arose in the amorning) exemplified the new translation = "Love is kind and envies no-one".

"Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up". The arrogance of charity, like that of the other luxury of the entrenched classes, tolerance, implies a becoming concern for but a reluctance to join less fortunate neighbors. Albert Schweitzer has given more of his life than of himself to the natives of Lambarene. Tolstoy forsook his wife and children to teach love and non-resistance to evil to his peasants at Yasnaya Polyana. The question of whether he lived with them or among them prompted Chekhov to write "in electricity and steam there is more love for man than in chastity and abstinence from meat".

Almost a century ago the lepers of Molokai could have written the new translation: "Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude" for they had learned fortitude and faith and even hope from Father Damien. This Belgian priest was a rough diamond, a sloppy, stubborn, uncouth, often unreasonable and sometimes financially careless peasant who was so moved by the plight of the lepers in Hawaii that, although he had no knowledge of medicine and less of hygiene, he joined their remote colony. His acceptance of them as individuals restored their self-respect. He wrote no books, he made no lecture tours, and yet his understanding of these outcasts inspired people all over the world to help -- Lady Mount Temple sent an engraving of The Good Shepherd, the Hon. Maude Stanley sent a magic lantern with Scriptural slides, many people sent money, and Mr. Burne-Jones sent his water-color of the Vision of St. Francis.

In 1793 a Yellow Fever epidemic decimated the population of Philadelphia. While the famous Dr. Benjamin Rush prescribed "strong purges and copious bloodletting",

a hard-headed business man named Stephen Girard abandoned his counting house for two months to administer the pest-house and treat the indigent patients with the most tender care. He later wrote: "Of all the patients tended I do not suppose I cured one; nevertheless you will agree that I have been very moderate and that none of my confrères has killed fewer than I."

"Charity doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." The late Isabella Stewart Gardner, after suffering the slings and arrows of outraged Back Bay, was asked by a hospital special gifts committee to contribute to the Boston Charitable Eye and Ear. Her much-discussed short-comings did not include prolixity so she simply replied: "Is there a charitable eye or ear in Boston?" Mrs. Gardner's behaviour was believed to be unseemly - how else could she attract so many artists? The liveliness of her salon kept victorian Boston in a constant state of excitement and secret envy as her intimates included such personages as Whistler, Sandow the strong man, Zorn, Paderewski, Bernhard Berenson and John L. Sullivan. She most certainly sought her own, especially when bargaining for a Rembrandt or a Botticelli. She even got herself admitted to Charles Eliot Norton's lectures at Harvard to refine her discernment in collecting works of art. She was easily provoked as in the encounter just mentioned - she also had some pungent things to say about the "Home for the Friendless", the "Home for Incurables" and other such grisly institutions. Nor was her thinking evil rare or much concealed, especially when confronted by snobs, stuffed shirts, or the tasteless. No matter how evil, she never contradicted a story about herself if it was clever or witty.

The new translation, however, throws a somewhat different light on her: "Love is never selfish nor quick to take offence". Throughout her long life her primary concerns were helping young artists, such as John Singer Sargent, and collecting renaissance art. In later years the prodigality of her purchases of old masters forced her to limit her luxuries to a daily bunch of violets to be placed beside her favorite Giotto. By dint of strict economies she realized her great dream of leaving her magnificent collection, beautifully housed, and adequately endowed to the people of Boston. For forty years young and old, students, tourists, the curious, the lonely or bored, artist and scholars, have been refreshed and nourished by wandering through the treasure-filled rooms and the acaccia-filled atrium of her beloved Fenway Court.

"Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth". Iniquity rejoiceth in charity as April fifteenth approaches and deductions look more and more attractive. Were it not too late for last year and too early to think of next year, one would be tempted to make good on some of the pledges with which soliciting friends have been placated during the year. Daniel Boorstin of the University of Chicago even says that "temptations to disingenuousness are accentuated by our tax laws".

Between hunting witches and founding Yale^{college,} Cotton Mather took time to think and write a good deal about charity, and even to practice it. "The reward of doing good", he said "is an increase in opportunity to do good". From the pulpit of the North Church he proclaimed that Boston's helpfulness and readiness to every good work were well and favorably known in heaven - no doubt he got this from the same unimpeachable source that gave him so much evidence of sorcery. In his writings he

also emphasized that charity was sound political policy, a mild but effective instrument of social control, not to be abused by misapplying it.

The new translation reads "Love keeps no score of wrongs, does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth" - and, thereby, seems to take much of the joy out of life. However, one suspects that this verse may refer less to Pollyanna the glad girl than to Mahatma Ghandi the friend and tormentor of the English, the Africans, the Brahmins and the untouchables.

"Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things". This covers almost everything from pre-natal to perpetual care but I believe the new version is more specific in saying "There is nothing love can not face, there is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance". Robert Louis Stevenson's wife, in her preface to his book "Lay Morals" wrote:

"In our long voyage on the yacht Casco, we visited many islands; I believe on every one we found the scourge of leprosy. In the Marquesas there was a regular leper settlement, though the persons living there seemed free to wander where they wished, fishing on the beach, or visiting friends in the villages. I remember one afternoon at Anaho when my husband and I, tired after a long quest for shells, sat down on the sand to rest a while. A native man stepped out from under some cocoanut trees, regarding us hesitatingly as though fearful of intruding. My husband waved an invitation to the stranger to join us, offering his cigarette to the man in the island fashion. The cigarette was accepted and, after a puff or two, courteously passed back, again according to native etiquette. The hand that held it was the maimed hand of a leper. To my consternation my husband took the cigarette

the theological axe, superceded by "love" as shown in the foregoing examples.

However, in both the second and third editions, Webster's definitions of "love" are somewhat racier than can be presumed to have been in the minds of the British prelates or of St. Paul. Who captured the current idiom, Webster or Westminster?

Perhaps the first Pope had the last word when in his first epistle, St. Peter said "love covers a multitude of sins".

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