writer, and that it is only *what goes in* that really counts in the passage of idea from one person to another.

The extent to which a simplified form of English can help in increasing the proportion of 'information conveyed' will be the measure of its usefulness in Christian communication.

Since the above article was written the author has completed a very tentative draft of his word-list. Readers who are interested in putting this tentative list to a practical test are invited to write to: Mr. H. Dennett, 51 Oakwood Avenue, Boreham Wood, Herts., England. It should be noted that in compiling his list, the author has not selected the thousand English words that are most likely already known to literates with a limited knowledge of English; rather he has sought to select the thousand words which are of the highest 'operative' value, and which may be relatively easily learned. To this end he also plans to produce reader materials which teach this small but highly operative vocabulary. He also hopes to deal later with questions of syntax in simplified English.

THE STORY OF
A POPULAR VERSION IN SWEDISH

ÅGE HOLTER

In 1962 a new translation of Mark into Swedish became the great sensation of the year. The newspapers and the weekly press, not only in Sweden but all over Scandinavia, had big headings such as: "The Shock Bible", "The Beatnik Bible" or "The Slang Bible". Ten thousand copies were sold in a few days, and a new edition appeared very shortly. A best-seller was born. And inquiries from distant parts of the world indicate that rumours of it spread like wild-fire.

In spite of this, the history of this new translation is an unhappy one. The sensation it created seems to have served very well the reaction against any attempt at adapting the Bible text to modern readers. Any church and any Bible Society would have declined with thanks this sort of publicity. To Christian people in Sweden it has been an embarrassing experience. How are we to explain these seemingly incompatible facts?

It all started with the excellent idea of pastor Grönlund to translate the gospel of Mark into the spoken every-day language of Swedish teenagers. He had especially in mind a certain group of very bad repute ("raggarne", known for alcoholism, sexual promiscuity and aggressive behaviour). He felt that something radical had to be done in order to make the message relevant to these young people, whose world is the very opposite of the Biblical reality. Here is one of his statements: "Take for instance a key-word like 'gospel'. Does that word convey anything at all to a fourteen year old boy in a Stockholm suburb? If it means anything to him, it would rather be associated with something dull. But probably it means less than nothing. Yet this

word aroused in the first Christians a feeling of unrestrained joy: the message that God had overcome the Devil made them feel free. But what can a boy feel who does not take account of transcendent reality at all? God and Devil are at most swear words."

This explains why the very title has been changed: *"We won!" said Mark*. On the cover appears a group of three boys with their hands raised, very much like a scene from "West Side Story". The great scandal, however, was that pastor Grönlund introduced into his translation the slang of the teenagers. "It has been my aim to put myself in the place of a 14 year old boy, to discover how he would have expressed the matter in his own words and within his comparatively narrow range of ideas."

In order to illustrate this slang we will have to reproduce it in English, although aware of the fact that this is almost an impossible undertaking. Here are some of the most striking expressions: "Listen Jesus, may I hike with you?" (Mark 5:18) "What a skirt! What curves!" (exclamation addressed to Salome, depicted as "a strip-tease dancer"). "O. Ph." (Organization of Pharisees) "Food strike" ("fast"). Some verses may be quoted at length: "Believe me, said Jesus, there will be forgiveness for all sins and devilry men have done. But when it comes to rubbish talk against the Holy Spirit, they have had it. It's stop for ever." (Mark 3:28, 29).

Unfortunately it all rested on a complete miscalculation. The teenagers turned against the author, telling him not only that the slang used, was antiquated, but that they would not care for a Bible that was a mere echo of their own gibberish. The Swedish press was unanimous in its crushing criticism. And church people were deeply shocked.

The worst of it, from a mere literary point of view, was a striking incongruency of style. Grönlund did not dare to render many of the words spoken by Jesus in the same street parlance. Those are reproduced almost exactly as in the authorized version, and so are some of the most important Biblical terms. This mixture of slang and traditional Biblical language made a paradoxical impression.

When the Swedish press sounded the alarm, it was on the basis of a proof-copy for pre-review. Before the publication, the Bishops of Sweden (who justly disapproved of Grönlund rendering "high-priest" with "archbishop" and "chief-priests" with "bishops", just as "scribes" were called "professors"), persuaded pastor Grönlund to drop the slang. When the book finally appeared, most of the sensation was gone. There is no slang left, and what remains is a poor re-narration of the Biblical text. When Mark writes, "He marveled because of their unbelief", Grönlund turns it into, "He was deeply upset because they had no confidence in him". And compare e.g. Mark 6:16, R.S.V.: "But when Herod heard of it he said: John, whom I beheaded, has been raised", with Grönlund's: " 'I know myself who he is,' said king

Antipas, when he heard all this guesswork. 'I know myself that he is exactly this Baptist-John who now has been raised. You certainly remember that guy whom I beheaded?' "

(The section headings, however, are well done. They are made on the model of modern journalism, e.g.: "Polygamy in heaven?", "The man in the cemetery".)

And this is why a strange thing happened. The book became a best-seller on the basis of a manuscript which was not printed in its original form. Due to the enormous publicity, people buy it expecting to find the sensation they are eager for.

There are at least two lessons to be learned from this failure. The first is that there are certain limits for a popular version. Every Bible translator is familiar with the conservative reluctance to any change in "the dear old Bible". He will have to brave that reluctance, but he must not outrage people's feeling of reverence for what is still considered holy in this unholy world. Secondly, in translating the Bible the question of style is of vital importance. We certainly need to study the science of translation, but there is a linguistic sensitiveness which cannot be learned in a lesson or two.

Perhaps we can add a word on the carefulness with which a Bible Society must approach a project of simplifying the Bible. In the case of Grönlund, his private publisher has been accused of sharp practice. Although very unjust, this reaction is a caution against sponsoring a popular version unless it is done by thoroughly competent people.

The Swedish experiment was abortive. But we have to credit pastor Grönlund with having genuine zeal for reaching the young people living "east of Eden" with the Word of God. This must always be the concern of the Church and the Bible Societies. No reaction and no failure must prevent us from trying to "become everything in turn to men of every sort, so that in one way or another we may save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).