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A New Look at the Good Book

THE Bible, some statisticians are fond of telling us, stands among the world's best-sellers. What they don't tell us is that it's often one of the world's best dust gatherers, standing in its black leather and gold leaf on so many bookshelves, unopened except for the occasional crossword puzzle reference, and even then handled with the same defensive embarrassment as one handles a meeting with a well-wisher who is uncomfortably aware of one's shortcomings. The idea of taking the book down and reading it with an open mind is almost as foreign as the idea of family prayers.

Part of this, of course, is because we haven't outgrown our Sunday-school ideas about religion. We either can't, or don't want to, admit that faith can be something for adults with adult minds. But part of it, perhaps the greater part, is because the language inside that beautiful binding is as outmoded and strange to us as the original Greek and Hebrew were to the first translators. And this is no small barrier to comprehension, particularly in these days when we are spoonfed literature "written so we can understand it." We need something else besides an open mind. We need an open Commentary.

The idea behind the *Readings from the Bible* now being broadcast daily from the YAs, YZs and X stations was to dispense with the Commentary and yet make the impact of the Bible as strong and as fresh as the original ideas were when they were first written down. And while the easiest way of doing this would have been to take one or all of the many new translations of the Bible currently in the bookshops and to broadcast them, it would have been to overlook one intangible though important factor; the authority of the Authorised Version. The authority of language accepted, quoted and argued over for nearly three centuries.

This, then, was the principal problem that I started to face over a year ago, when I gathered four translations of the whole Bible, five separate books



Spencer Digby photograph

PETER CAPE, who is in charge of NZBS religious broadcasts, tells how the daily "Readings from the Bible" are selected and recorded.

of Gospels and epistles, a commentary and a concordance on my desk and began to select a batch of passages. I say "started to face" because, unlike the business of picking theme music, choosing readers, and finding the least laborious method of putting theme, reading and back announcement together, the problem of selection is still going on, and will go on until the last of the 900 readings is recorded.

The simplest way of tackling it, I found, was to start with the better-known passages in the Authorised Version. If a passage could be read in such a way that the listener's mind, instead of slipping easily over the well-polished surface of the familiar words, was tripped and sent crashing through into the meaning beneath, it was selected. But, on the other hand, if it seemed that a newer translation could untie a knotty point or sweeten a corrupt phrase, or erase a misconception arising from the

(continued on next page)

ON BEING GIVEN A NEW CALENDAR

*N*OW that the glossy calendar is printed

All that remains is for it to come true
With days made just to order nicely tinted
As this mountain in the photographic view.

No one has doubted enough to leave a gap
That the holidays will fall in proper places
Nor that the movable feasts will fail to stop
At the right time and spend it at the races.

Nobody has allowed for Armageddon
Though there are those who claim it's on the way—
Or calamity with a comet encountered head-on
Which would explode our theorem any day.

I turn these leaves and guess at the disaster
Which may await me round some darkened corner;
Friday the thirteenth crows like a black rooster
Yodelling doom upon the helpless dreamer.

Even allowing that the worst will not
Eventuate—the world and I survive—
I look with trepidation on days not yet
Safely accomplished in the ways I serve.

Meals yet uneaten, rent and debts to earn,
Time must be purchased, life doled in advance;
One is the slave of the hand of the slave who turns
The press that prints this writ of circumstance.

And on the wrist the Swiss-made hours tick off
Small spendthrift reasons that should make us think
Twice before the luxury of a laugh
Crosses our lips—and drown it with a drink.

—Louis Johnson