

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY.

BY F. KLINKMANN.

“LET us be the first institution that ever emanated from one of the nations of Europe for the express purpose of doing good to all the rest.” Such was the motto of a pamphlet put forward, at the beginning of the last century, by a few earnest-minded, philanthropic men, who had conceived the idea of starting a society for “The General Dispersion of the Holy Scriptures at Home and Abroad.”

The proposal originated at a committee meeting of the Tract Society on December 7th, 1802. A minister from Wales who was present on that occasion told a pathetic story of the dearth of Bibles in his native land. He urged the Tract Society to issue some cheap Welsh Bibles for circulation among the peasants of the Principality. While he was speaking, a thought suggested itself to one of the listeners, which was destined to result in what has been termed the greatest literary enterprise of the nineteen Christian centuries. “If such a plan were likely to prove useful to Wales, why not to other lands?” the secretary remarked. “Surely a society might be formed for the purpose of translating and circulating the Books of the Old and New Testaments for the Continent—for the World!”

The idea appealed to that little gathering with singular force. Further meetings were arranged to formulate a scheme in detail. Finally on March 7th, 1804, as the outcome of these deliberations, the British and Foreign Bible Society was born.

Its success was speedy and decisive. From the first it enlisted the sympathies of some of the most prominent and influential men in

the country; and what is still more remarkable, from the very outset down to the present time, it has proved the broad platform on which Christians of the most diverse views meet and work in unison. It is oblivious of denominations, sects, and creeds. Its concern is solely with the Bible; its aim is to issue it broadcast to all tongues and all peoples,

“without note or comment”; and, in consequence, it is the chief religious institution that is able to associate and unify all Christian communions. In this particular its policy has never varied. The founders recognised that the business management must be so arranged as to commend itself equally to all denominations; therefore three secretaries were appointed to represent respectively the Established Church, the Nonconforming Churches, and the Reformed Churches of the Continent. It was also



THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY, IN QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, E.C.

resolved that the Committee should consist of thirty-six laymen, fifteen of whom must be members of the Church of England, and fifteen members of other Christian communions, the remaining six to be foreigners resident in London. The same representative character has been faithfully adhered to through the hundred years of the Society's existence; and to-day this even balance of denominational interests is maintained not only in the Committee, but also in the official staff.

The work of the Bible Society is twofold: it is concerned firstly with the translation and revision of the Scriptures into all the languages of mankind; and secondly, in the printing and circulation of these books as cheaply as possible over the whole of the inhabited globe. One of the early acts of the Society was to issue a large edition of the Scriptures at low prices in the Welsh language. But from the first it had no frontier, and earnestly considered the needs of lands beyond our own.

A century ago the Bible was current in about forty different languages. To-day, some part of the Bible is published in over four hundred languages, including every great vernacular of the world. Of these, 367 appear on the list of the Bible Society. Between fifty and sixty sets of characters are employed in printing these languages; while in order to make the Scriptures legible and intelligible to all races and creeds, there are fifty languages in which a version is printed in two or more different characters.

Few persons unconnected with the work can form any estimate of the immense amount of labour involved in translating a single Gospel into the speech of some savage tribe. First of all that speech must be mastered by daily familiar intercourse with the savages themselves. Next it must be reduced to writing and grammar. Then there remains the most trying task of all—

to discover terms that will convey to untutored minds the moral and spiritual significance of the great watchwords of the Bible. What does a cannibal understand of such terms as Faith, Hope, and Love? He has nothing in his vocabulary to correspond with the elemental ideas of the Gospel. As an instance of the time and actual drudgery this work entails, it may be mentioned that Henry Nott, the companion of



THE ENTRANCE-HALL OF THE BIBLE HOUSE.

John Williams, spent twenty years in Tahiti to perfect himself in the language of the island, and then devoted another twenty years to translating the Scriptures into Tahitian. The recent revision of the Lifu Bible, for the largest of the Loyalty Islands, involved no less than 52,310 corrections. Some idea of the expense of this branch of the Bible Society's work may be gained from the following representative cases. The last revision of the Malagasi Bible cost the Society over £3,000. To

Dr. Morrison and his assistants, for producing the first Chinese Bible, grants were made to the extent of £10,000. To Dr. William Carey and his associates in the various Serampore versions, produced early in the nineteenth century, the Society's grants of money and material reached a total of £30,000. Last year alone the payments made by the Society for translations and revisions amounted to nearly £4,000. At the present time about one thousand representative linguists, missionaries, and native assistants are organised into committees in different parts of the world. Their work is supervised and financed from the Bible House, whose editorial sub-com-

mittee, composed mainly of philological experts, meets every month. During the past year matters for consideration came before this committee relating to 151 languages and dialects. The latest translation published by the Society is part of St. Matthew's Gospel in Yalunka, for C.M.S. missionaries, in the hinterland of Sierra Leone. To an Englishman, the diversity of speech to be found in one country is often a matter of amazement. For instance, last year the Society's agents sold the Scriptures in more than twenty different languages in the Empire of Austria, and in more than fifty different languages in the Empire of Russia ;

while it prints some portion of the Bible in eighty-one of the different tongues indigenous to Africa. In this respect the Bible Society may be regarded as the world's greatest philological institute. It has crystallised and reduced to written form the speech of scores of barbaric tribes which had not so much as an alphabet. Before the first rush of gold-seekers invaded the Yukon Valley, the Society had already printed most of the New Testament in Tukudh for the Indians of Klondyke.

Moreover, one of its ideals has been not only to produce the Bible in every tongue, but to secure one single and accepted version in each language, that shall be as correct as careful revision at the hands of competent scholars can make it. By this means the Society seeks to avoid the misfortune of rival sectarian translations in the mission-field.



THE FAMOUS LIBRARY AT THE BIBLE HOUSE.

On the shelves are Scriptures in four hundred languages.

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blind, I picked up two or three at least, by using your translations into Hindustani, Persian, Sanscrit, Japanese, and Spanish as a book to begin with. It was so convenient to know by heart the grand old text while picking up the new tongue."

With a view to economy, foreign Bibles are printed in or near the countries for which they are intended, whenever it is possible and advantageous to do so. Thus the Chinese Scriptures are most admirably produced in Yokohama. By this means the expense of freighting is saved—often a heavy item. For instance, when the first vernacular Bibles were sent out to Uganda,

"On Earth peace
"Good will toward Men.

Victoria R. S.
Windsor Castle - March 8. 1857

QUEEN VICTORIA'S FAVOURITE TEXT, WRITTEN FOR
THE BIBLE SOCIETY ON HER JUBILEE.

each copy, which had cost the Society 6s. 4d. to produce, entailed another 10s. 4d. for carriage from London to Uganda, as goods had to be conveyed inland from the coast on the heads of native porters. Moreover, quite apart from the question of freightage, it is a distinct gain if the Bible be issued in type and paper with which its readers are already familiar.

Another interesting section of the Society's work is the providing of Scriptures in Moon and Braille types for the blind—not only in Europe, but also in India and the East, where there are a far larger proportion than in our own country. Her late Majesty Queen Victoria took much interest in this work, as is evidenced by the following letter: "Her Majesty is gratified to find how much is being done for the education of the blind in

India, and also to know that these useful efforts were initiated chiefly by you. The Queen congratulates you on the admirable results of your labours, and trusts that you may be blessed with health and strength to continue them."

In addition to preparing the Scriptures in all tongues for all people, the Bible Society



BIBLE PRESENTED TO
KING EDWARD VII—



—ON HIS CORONATION.

Two photographs by Campbell and Gray.

is also engaged in circulating them far and wide. Since its foundation it has issued over 180,000,000 copies. Its output last year was over 5,000,000 copies, complete or in portions. The circulation is accomplished by various means. The average number of colporteurs now employed by the Society exceeds 800; and the Society's budget for colportage expenses is over

£42,500 per annum. Unlike the Society's agents and sub-agents, who are stationed at depôts in busy centres, the colporteur, who is usually a native of the country in which he works, makes his way along the bypaths and far from the beaten track. He is a curiously interesting figure, this "Man with the Book." He is of every shade of colour and is frequently of humble origin. He travels from town to town, and from one village to another, like a pedlar, with his pack of Testaments and Gospels. He is chosen for the work not merely on account of his business capacity, but because he is likewise a lover of the Book he carries,

is more practised than piety. In 1900, one of the Society's Russian colporteurs, a Georgian monk, set out to cross the Caucasus, but has never been heard of since.

Yet these men seem undaunted by difficulty. They are at work among the exiles and emigrants in Siberia; they make their way into the noisome sulphur-mines of Sicily; we find them among the navvies engaged on the Simplon Tunnel; among the coolies on the sugar-plantations in British Guiana; on the vessels in the world's great harbours and those passing through the Suez Canal; outside Buddhist temples in Korea; in the prisons of Formosa; on Japanese railway-cars; and in the isolated homesteads and hamlets of Nova Scotia.

As to adventures nearer home, have not some of them found an abiding place in English literature in the travel volumes of that fascinating enthusiast and "brilliant amateur of letters," George Borrow? That delightful author's "The Bible in Spain" and "The Gipsies of Spain" were, of course, the immediate outcome of his commission by the Bible Society to travel through Spain on their behalf. In that



COLPORTEUR AND DONKEY-CART IN ROME.

and is able to recommend it from personal knowledge and conviction. He encounters severe hardships and is frequently in actual danger of his life. More particularly is this the case in Mohammedan countries, where fanaticism is instinct in the blood, combined with a racial antagonism to an alien faith. The most recent martyr to the cause was El Kaid, one of the Society's colporteurs in Morocco, and a convert from Islam to Christianity. He was openly attacked, last August, in the streets of Morocco, and succumbed to the injuries he received. Perils of other kinds also beset the path of the colporteur in regions where brigandage

capacity Borrow spent some five years in Spain, during the disturbed early years of Isabella II., travelling over every part of Castille and Leon, as well as the southern part of the Peninsula and northern Portugal. His adventurous habit again and again brought him into collision with both brigands and Carlists, as well as with the orthodox Roman Catholic priesthood, and he was for a time imprisoned in Madrid.

The colporteur's method of travel is as varied as his own nationality. In Malasia, he employs a bullock-wagon or a native boat; in Lombardy he scours the country on a bicycle; in Russia his sledge jingles across

the frozen steppes; on the slopes of the Andes he trusts to the sure-footed mule. One colporteur made an eleven weeks' tour down the Lena, a Siberian river 3,000 miles long, selling Gospels to the Yakuts in their own language in the villages along the banks. Part of the way he and his wife travelled—with half a ton of Scriptures—on an open raft, one keeping watch at night for fear of robbers, while the other slept. In Mongolia, where no other Christian organisation is working, the Society's sub-agent traverses the desolate plains with a small caravan of camels, visiting the nomad tribes in their camps.

And this brings us to another vital element in the Society's work. It often acts as the pioneer—or, as it has been called, the "ploughshare"—of missions, sending its colporteurs into new countries and opening up the ground by means of a dispersion of



THE SOCIETY'S NATIVE STAFF AT SHANGHAI.

the Gospel; so that when the missionary arrives, he sometimes finds, as in Korea, the people prepared beforehand and waiting for his teaching.

Again, the Society wins permission to work in some fields that are closed to normal missionary enterprise. In the Russian Empire, for example, which embraces one-seventh of the earth's surface, and 130,000,000 of its people, Church and State alike encourage and assist the Society's agents, who even obtain free rail and steamer passes and

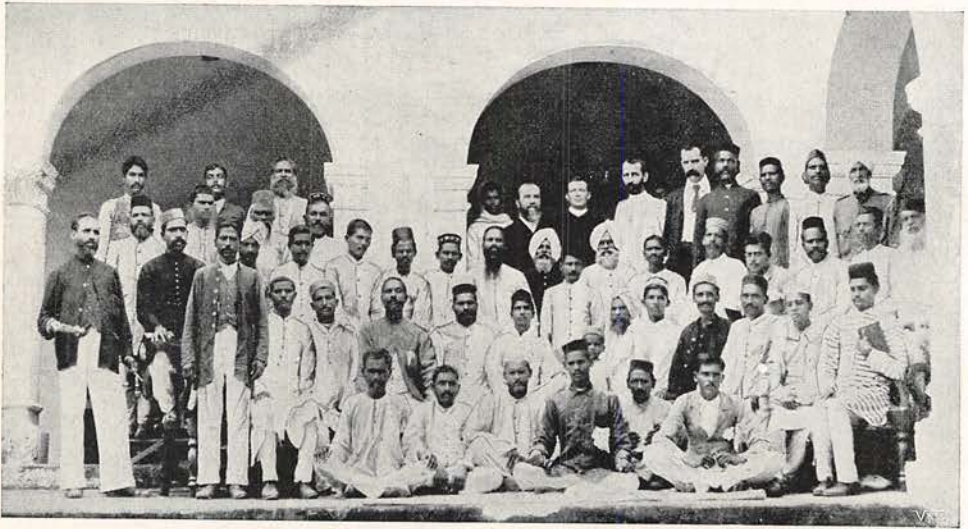


THE FIRST BIBLE CART IN MANCHURIA.

free carriage for the Bibles; yet this is an Empire that excludes ordinary foreign missionaries. The Society's colporteurs are exempt from certain taxes in the Argentine and Buenos Ayres; while generous concessions are made by railways in Demerara, Costa Rica, Buenos Ayres, Uruguay, as well as by Spronston's Steamboat Co. and the Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. In the Soudan, for political reasons, no aggressive missionary work is permitted at present among the Moslem population; but the Bible Society three years ago was allowed to establish a depôt at Omdurman opposite the door of the new mosque; and two Arab colporteurs sell the Scriptures along the Blue and the White Nile. The mysterious highlands of Tibet have

Judah, Menelek the Second, Emperor of Ethiopia by the will of God. Peace and health from God to the Honourable Mr. Alfred Cooper. The two copies of the New Testament, which were sent by the hand of the Englishman, were duly received, and I tender my best thanks for them. If you send a quantity of these books to Adis Abeba by a person, bearer of a letter from you, they will be received with pleasure, and I will see that they are distributed and that a good price is paid for them. Written at Adis Abeba, on the 23rd day of Tonba, 1893" (1901 A.D.).

A magnificent pair of elephant's tusks reached the Bible House some years earlier as a gift from his Majesty; but this is the



GROUP OF INDIAN COLPORTEURS, TAKEN AT A CONFERENCE IN ALLAHABAD, AUGUST, 1900.

been sealed for centuries against Europeans, but the New Testament has been translated into Tibetan, and is printed for the Society by Tibetan Christians at Ghoom, on the Himalayas. These books are bought by traders, who carry them back into the snowy fastnesses of that great, unknown land, and into the mysterious city of Lhasa.

Abyssinia is also a "closed country" to missionary enterprise; but not to the Scriptures. In 1900, the Bible Society sent some specially bound copies of the freshly corrected Ethiopic New Testament for presentation to the Emperor Menelek and his Queen. The Society's agent in Alexandria received a reply, of which the following is the literal translation:—

"The conquering Lion of the tribe of

first occasion on which an emperor has offered to act as the Society's agent in his own capital!

In addition to its colporteurs, the Society also supports 620 native Christian Bible-women in the East, in connection with nearly 50 different missionary organisations.

An important feature in the work of the Bible Society is the way it serves as the chief storehouse from which all British, and not a few Continental, foreign missions must draw their supplies. As a rule, books for the foreign field are granted on such terms that they cost practically nothing to the missions which receive them. No genuine application for a grant of Scriptures has ever been denied. No missionary society's request to print and publish a properly



COLPORTEUR'S BOAT ON THE PAHANG RIVER.

authenticated version of the Scriptures in a new tongue has ever been refused. The Church Missionary Society uses ninety different translations; the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts has been supplied with sixty foreign languages; while Nonconformist foreign missions obtain from it the bulk of all the Scriptures they use.



A COLPORTEUR'S CART IN LUZON.

Photo by Squires & Ingham.

Altogether it has expended over £13,000,000. But only a percentage of this returns to its coffers.

It must be clearly understood, however, that the normal policy of the Society has always been to sell, and not to give the Scriptures away indiscriminately. World-wide experience proves most conclusively that any book for which a price, however small, has been paid, will be valued and read



COLPORTAGE BY BULLOCK-CART: IN THE MALAY PENINSULA.

Canada, and New Zealand, the Society's powerful auxiliaries not only defray their own expenses, and themselves undertake the printing and passing through the press of certain versions, such as those for the New Hebrides and New Guinea, but they also remit substantial contributions annually to the parent Society.

And it must not be forgotten that the Bible Society is emphatically a progressive institution. On the shelves of its famous library in Queen Victoria Street, side by side with "Tyndale" and "Coverdale" Bibles, and a copy of the first Bible printed in America—in the language of the vanished Indians of Massachusetts—stands the latest edition of the Revised Version. This is sufficiently indicative of the wide range of its literary scope. In its home and foreign administration, the watch-



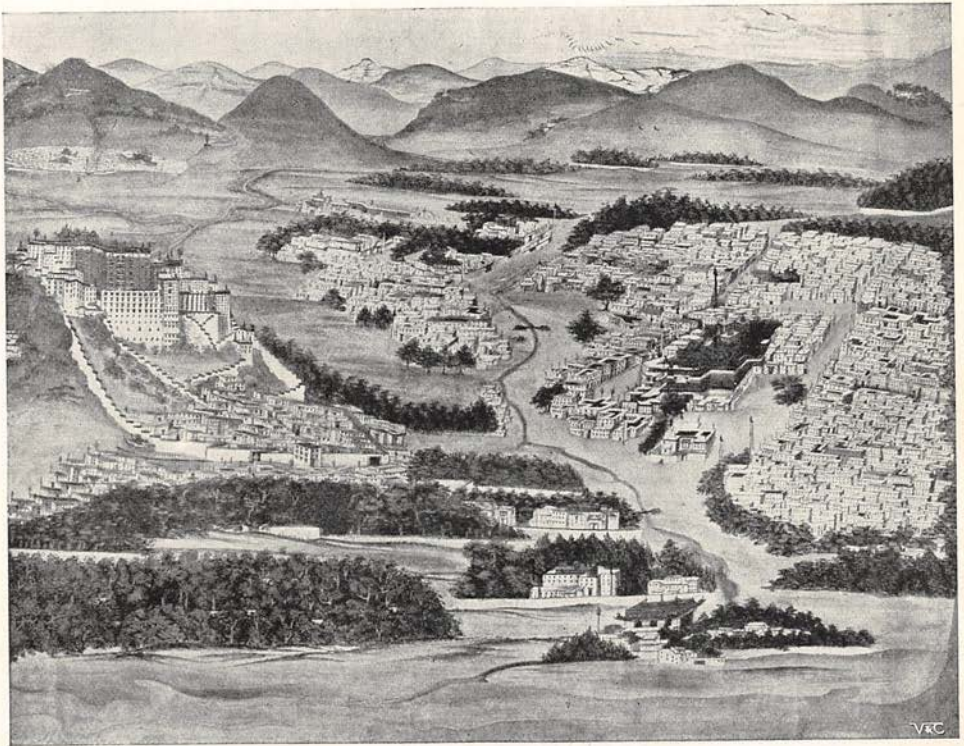
Photo by]

[J. F. Drysdale.

INTERIOR OF THE BIBLE SOCIETY'S DEPÔT IN FORMOSA.

word has always been "Onward!" and never more so than at the present time.

In March, 1903, it entered upon the



THE MYSTERIOUS CITY OF LHASA.

From a painting, now in the Bible House, which was sold last year to the Society's agent on the Tibet frontier, by a native artist, who had forfeited his right to return to the country by painting; this "Holy City." Only two other pictures of Lhasa are known, one in the possession of the Royal Geographical Society, and the other the property of the French Geographical Society.

one hundredth year of its existence; and to commemorate this a special fund of 250,000 guineas is being raised, to be devoted to the further extension of its work abroad.

The normal income of the Society arises from the subscriptions, donations, and legacies of Christian people all over the world, the annual subscribers including his Majesty the German Emperor. From its first beginning, the Society has depended on these voluntary contributions to make up the huge difference each year between what it receives from the sale of books and what it spends in their translation, publication, and circulation. At present, it gets back by sales about forty per cent. of its total outlay. In recent years the urgent demands on the Society have multiplied much more rapidly

than its income has increased. And this Centenary Fund, to which his Majesty the King has sent a hundred guineas, represents the estimated sum necessary to meet such new claims.

Innumerable great centenary meetings are to be held in Great Britain and the Colonies during the coming year. But undoubtedly the most remarkable date will be Sunday, March 6th, 1904, which is to be observed as "Bible Sunday" in all Christian denominations throughout the entire world—an international celebration unparalleled in history, which will recall, in the most dramatic and impressive fashion, the dictum of the late Master of Balliol:—

"All Christians have at least two things in common. They have the Bible, and they have Sunday."

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

NOW, it befell, on a windy day,
In a waste and barren place,
That I met my love in a turn of the way,
And met her face to face.

*And never a single word spake she,
Nor ever looked at me,
For her eyes were set afar, far off,
Over the open sea.*

Now tell me truly and tell me well,
Is it the sound of the rock-bound bell,
Is it presage of strain and storm and pain?
Or yet once more and yet again
Is it the thought that never we twain
As of old shall tryst in the soft salt mist
That holds thy gaze so steadily
Over and out to the open sea?

'Tis the night rides up the streets of the west,
'Tis the tide turns back with never a rest
To the ceaseless ravel, the tireless travel,
The heaving settle of ebb and flow.
As the seaweed goeth, so shall I go;
As the seaway goeth, the night wind bloweth,
My way shall be their will with me—
Night and the wind of Destiny.

My love she turned with a rising sigh,
She turned, she turned from me.
The wind drove by with a sobbing cry—
And she walked wearily.

*But never a single word spake she,
Nor ever looked at me,
For her eyes were set afar, far off,
Over the open sea.*

THORNTON SHERBURNE HARDY,