

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Bible at Work.

BY THE REV. W. FISHER, M.A.

FOR the Book there is no word as explicit as that which commissions the man. The circulation of the Scriptures has no counterpart to "Go ye therefore and preach;" and some point out that Christ gave no authority for such a work. In defence and answer it may be urged: (1) The Apostolic appeal was always to the Book, and for authority the Apostolic Gospel was founded upon it. While not world-wide, there was even then, through the Jew and perhaps beyond the Jew, a very wide distribution of the Scriptures. The knowledge, presence, or possession of the Book is involved in St. Paul's statement that "the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began . . . is made manifest, and by (*διὰ*) the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the Everlasting God *made known to all nations* for the obedience of faith." What is being done to-day had incidentally already been largely done. (2) A century's work with three to four hundred million copies must unanswerably demonstrate its rightness or wrongness.



Mr. John R. Kilburn, following in the steps of Dr. Baedeker, has been visiting prisons and hospitals in Russia, distributing the Scriptures. He gives a remarkable illustration of the power of the Word. Dostoevsky was banished to Siberia for ten years for complicity in a plot. Four were spent among felons; but while he went out a revolutionary he returned a great Christian leader. The cause of his conversion is given in a quotation from George Brandes, an atheist and a Danish critic. "A great change had taken place with him. During the four years spent as a convict he had only one book, namely, the New Testament, and he read it over and over. All exasperation died down in his soul . . . and he returned as the philanthropist among Russian authors, as the author of the helpless and the fallen."



Colportage is not instinctively suggestive of romance or heroism, yet it is constantly associated with much quiet bravery. A colporteur in Lower Egypt was advised by a schoolteacher not to go into a certain part of the village. "Why?" "Because they will beat you." "I am going there immediately." He went and was quickly surrounded by a crowd of Moslems. "What is your object in coming among us, who are of the Faithful?" "I come that you may buy these books, and read, and become Christians." "Are you not afraid to speak such words to us?" "No; even if you should seek to kill me." "Truly your religion is a true religion. God will give you no small reward for being willing to labour, and to be insulted, and even to die for your faith; come and dine with us." "No; I must go round the village." He sold fifty-five books in that village. The British flag must perhaps be recognized, but such work and such a worker cannot be without fruit, and certainly not without honour.



The Holy Land with all its "changelessness" is not stereotyped in its impressions. Probably few visit it who know nothing of Nehemiah's feelings and are not oppressed with a sense not only of spiritual desolation but also of a set, almost fatalistic insensibility. In few places, if in any, have missionaries more of those difficulties that depress and dishearten. A special interest, therefore, attaches to a colportage experiment made this year by the Bible Society. Up to the day of the New Constitution the distribution of Scriptures in Palestine had been confined to Christians or Europeans. An experienced colporteur, named Vartan, commenced work in January. Among other places he visited Jaffa, Bethlehem, Bethsaida, Hebron, Samaria, Nazareth, Cana, and Lydda. As well as opposition he met with great kindness and much encouragement. Hebron is notoriously fanatical. "If they buy your books," said one, "it will be a miracle." "During my few days here," Vartan reports, "I have succeeded in selling seventy-two volumes, and the Moslems have proved more ready to buy than the Christians in other towns. One old Moslem, who used to be the governor of a town, helped me by writing out the names of forty-seven villages and explaining to me about them." Altogether 1,771 volumes were sold, in thirteen different languages. It was an experiment, and while illustrating ready enterprise, it probably marks the beginning of a new and welcome development.



Siberia is a land almost as vast in its possibilities as its area. Since the war with Japan emigration from Russia to Siberia has been rapidly increasing. In 1907 there were 700,000 immigrants, and in 1908 there were 760,000. Cheljabinsk is practically the door into Siberia from the West. Here the trains are met by colporteurs, and last year 2,500 Testaments and Gospels were given to immigrants too poor to purchase.



New conditions are quietly, and if at present not extensively, yet steadily transpiring in the heathen world. An aggressive Christianity has provoked aggressive heathenism; and philanthropic and tactical models are being copied. A *Sannyasi* who has spent some years in the United States has returned to Calcutta to found an Indo-American Mission which will provide *zenana* teachers for Hindu homes. The instruction will include lessons in reading and writing in Bengali, elementary arithmetic, dressmaking, etc. But the special object of the Mission is to keep up the Hindu religious spirit in the married women, by associating with American lady converts to Hinduism. Such an effort means more than imitation and confession; it means more than the evidence of Christian influence. It forebodes new problems in the future; for a heathenism fortified in any way with Christian characteristics will not be the more subject to conversion. Rather, perhaps, will it become the more confirmed, because, by comparison, the more contented with itself. Such a condition should but mean greater call and greater opportunity for the Bible, because of the greater challenge involved; for the Gospel and its preachers would be cast not upon contrast and not upon superlatives, but upon the sovereignties, the great solitaries that allow no comparison because Christianity shares them with no other. Both for religion at home and Christian warfare abroad the Bible has vast resources.