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The Bible at Work.

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

THE remarkable adventures of Dr. Sven Hedin, with the many impassable official obstructions that beset his journeys, are very forcible reminders of the barriers that Inner Tibet has reared against all that is foreign. Its door will yet be thrown open to the Gospel, but in the meantime, in a very literal and practical sense, "the Word of God is not bound." For many years a Tibetan version of the Scriptures has been passing stealthily into that land. The veneration paid to the script or characters in which the books are printed is effective both in preservation and distribution. The profanity required for the destruction of the book is conveniently shifted to another, which other is apt for the same purpose to pass the book on to someone else. Afghanistan and Abyssinia are corresponding instances of lands whose doorways, closed to the living preacher, yet so far afford admission to the Book.



In testimony to the power of the Bible, few places in the South Seas are more remarkable than the New Hebrides. When the Rev. Dr. Macdonald landed in Efate in 1872 the people were all heathen, savage, and cannibal, without a written language or any writing, and without law, authority, or government. They were all in the lowest state of degradation. In those days every man was his own army, navy, and policeman. He knew no defence save the weapon in his hand or the swiftness of his own foot. Not a single man went a yard from his hut but he was armed with deadly weapons. Strength was the only lawgiver. In 1889 the New Testament was put into the hands of such of the natives as were by that time Christianized. The entire population is Christian to-day. There is not a judge, or policeman, or civil court, or gaol on all the island, only two headmen in each community—a Christian Efate chief and a Christian Efate teacher. Crime is unknown there to-day, and in no place are life and property safer. The only law-book they have is the New Testament. The only school-book they have is the New Testament. The only legal reference for the man in the street is the New Testament. The New Testament has been made the code of law and life by all the people.



In the extremely interesting and valuable paper read at the Islington Conference the Dean of Canterbury said: "The English nation as a whole has probably been more influenced by the whole Bible, Law and Prophets and Psalms, than any other people, Protestant or Roman Catholic, the Scotch alone excepted, and in their case it has been due to the fact that, though the Bible has not been so systematically read in public, it has been the daily companion of every home." This is an aspect of Bible work too little appreciated and too little discerned. Its extensiveness and importance are beyond measurement, and are unquestionably the secret of all the best and strongest in English religion, English nationality, and English life. It is

impossible that the psychological accumulation of Scripture in the English mind can be of any but momentous influence. It is impossible but that the absence of it in other nations must be correspondingly evident. The work that would neutralize that deficiency is of high importance.



It was calculated that during a snowstorm in the early part of March 16,000,000 tons of snow fell within a radius of fifteen miles of Charing Cross Station in two hours and a half. These waters were in the atmosphere. "As the rain cometh down and the snow," so the national mind that contains the greatest storage of the Word can, at His command, be the instance of the greatest blessing. All people can be subject to religious movements, but the religion that demands "reasonable service" must demand knowledge of the Word of God. In this light it is scarcely possible to exaggerate the force of that constant stream of Scriptures that is pouring into so many countries to-day. More than half a million copies go yearly into Russia, and more than half a million into India, while through all agencies combined at least two and a half million copies are circulated in China. These must have their day, either in the near or farther future.



In 1833 the Basutoland Mission was founded by three young Frenchmen. At that time the Basutos were heathen savages of the grossest kind. In February the four Basuto chiefs who were on a visit to England were presented by the Bible Society with four specially bound copies of the Basuto Bible, bound in morocco, each with an illuminated inscription, and each accompanied by an English Bible. In acknowledging the gift, Seiso, the leading chief, said how much they would treasure it. They recognized that the Book was the great link between themselves and the English and all nations, and they valued it because it was God's Word, and God's Word was always true.



Without analysis no chemist could predicate the chemical contents of the body. Granted those contents, no chemist could fix their proportions. Granted their proportions, no chemist could determine their comparative importance in the life of a race. So, too, is it with the Bible. It has its moral and spiritual constituents; each has a utility beyond the immediate necessities or desires of any religious mind, individual or national, and beyond those of any particular time. Few missionaries, if any, could tell on their arrival which book in the Bible would be the favourite, or which would be the most spiritually serviceable. In the annals of regeneration, as of Christianity, it is remarkable what obscure parts of the Bible are requisitioned by the Holy Spirit. A very wonderful movement has been going on among the Miao tribes of South-West China, but a little while ago a most degraded people. It is interesting to read that St. John's Gospel is a particularly favourite book among them. According to Archdeacon Renison, St. John's Gospel holds, too, a chief place among the books of the New Testament with the Red Indians in Moosonee; while the Rev. Dr. George Brown says that in Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji, in order of partiality, Genesis and Jonah come before the Psalms and the historical books of the Old Testament.