

British and Foreign.

THE FIRST BIBLE SOCIETY :

WITH AN ANECDOTE ABOUT PUBLIC MEETINGS.

The Earl of Shaftesbury presided last summer at a meeting in Exeter Hall in support of the Irish Scripture Readers' Society. The attendance was not so large as the worthiness of the cause might have secured. In fact, one of the speakers referred to it as a "poor meeting." Lord Shaftesbury, in response to a hearty vote of thanks for his conduct in the chair, took up this phrase about a poor meeting, and in his own genial, cheery way, said, "I, for one, do not care one straw about this not being so large as some of the meetings, over which, from time to time, I preside. I have by this time become accustomed to very large meetings, and to very small meetings. Sometimes I have seen no good at all resulting from your large meetings ; whereas from very small gatherings the results have been of the most blessed and encouraging character. I once saw a vast amount of good result from what would have been called no meeting at all. In strict phraseology there was no meeting, although it was advertised to be held in this hall and what did actually take place transpired in the hall where we are now assembled.

"There was a resolution to be moved and seconded ; but beyond the two gentlemen who moved and seconded it—myself as chairman, and a gentleman of the press who had come as reporter—we had no audience. The reporter sat at that corner, and I sat in this chair. The two gentlemen moved and seconded the resolution, and I put it as chairman, and it was adopted with no dissentient voice.

"Well, the resolution of the meeting was reported in the newspapers, the money needed was soon forthcoming, and the person for whom the money was asked was sent to the University, where he studied for the Christian ministry, and he lived to become a black bishop of great usefulness and considerable distinction. So, whenever you are inclined to think slightly of a small meeting, or to feel discouraged by it, remember my little true story."

Lord Shaftesbury's personal recollection, which was received with much amusement, recalls to us a still more memorable example of a small meeting, followed by more wonderful results.

It is generally stated that the British and Foreign Bible Society, one of the mightiest agencies for good in the world, resulted from a desire to provide Bibles for the poor Welsh in their own tongue. A few friends belonging to the Religious Tract Society* met to talk the matter over, and one of them, the Rev. J. Charles, of Bala, said : "A Bible Society for Wales ! Why not a Bible Society for the whole world ?" The idea was at once taken up, and that year, 1804, witnessed the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

But, in point of fact, this was only the renewal and extension of a work which had commenced nearly a quarter of a century before. Not for the poor in Wales, but for the soldiers of the British army, was the first Bible Society

* It was the Rev. Joseph Hughes who uttered these words. Mr. Charles had gone to London to see what he could do to get a supply of Bibles for his countrymen, and while there the idea of a society for distributing the Bible alone, struck him. A few days afterwards he was introduced by Mr. Tarn to the Committee of the Tract Society, and represented with all the ardour of his character, the dearth of Bibles in his native principality, and the longing desire of the Welsh to have them. At the moment when this appeal was made for Bibles for the principality, the Rev. Joseph Hughes, who was one of the Secretaries of the Tract Society, and afterwards of the Bible Society, gave expression to those memorable words, "Surely a Society might be formed for the purpose ; and if for Wales, why not also for the empire and the world ?"