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A PURE AND HEALTHY LITERATURE.

The following deeply interesting paper was read by Henry Roberts, Esq., F.S.A., before the Social Science Association:—In a report which, as the English Vice-President, I presented at the meeting of the Congress held in Frankfort in 1857, the progress of popular education, the special instruction of the industrial classes, and the various measures adopted in England for the promotion of sanitary and domiciliary reform, were briefly alluded to; I also noticed the efforts made in this country for the circulating amongst the laboring population of a pure and wholesome literature, calculated to instruct, and, at the same time, to elevate their minds, as well as to direct them towards the only true source of permanent happiness.

The importance of sanitary ameliorations, and the weighty obligation which rests on those who have the power of promoting them, can scarcely be over-estimated; but viewing man, either in his relation to society, or as a responsible and an immortal being, another field of labour has a still higher claim on those who earnestly desire his well-being here and hereafter; and this is the object aimed at by the circulation of a pure literature.

With the progress of popular education in this country, and the unrestricted liberty of circulating works of every description excepting such as openly outrage morality, the desire of gain was causing the production of a large amount of low literature most objectionable in its character, tending to foster the worst passions of human nature, and stimulating to the commission

of crime, as well as leading to the contempt of all laws, human and Divine.

In order to counteract an evil so insidious, and one productive of so poisonous a state of the moral atmosphere, it was found worse than useless to have recourse to the law, excepting in a very few instances, of its notorious violation. But much greater success has resulted from the various efforts made to supplant, and drive out of the field, the most injurious of the publications in question, by the introduction of such as are calculated to create a healthy state of the moral atmosphere, to cultivate the mind, inform the judgment, to improve and elevate the taste.

The notice which I propose to offer must necessarily, in the main, be restricted to the efforts made by leading societies, some of which, as their titles indicate, were formed originally for the exclusive circulation of strictly religious publications, but now combine with that object a more extensive range of wholesome and instructive literature.

The society first established is that for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which was founded in 1698 by members of the Established Church. It has three distinct objects, one of them being the preparation and circulation of books and tracts, including the Sacred Scriptures and prayer books, in various languages. The outlay on the Society's publications has averaged for the last twenty-five years about £16,000 per annum. Its issues in the year 1860, 1861 were—Bibles and New Testaments, 235,592; Common Prayer Books, 399,997; bound books, 1,952,873; tracts, etc., 4,105,611; total of publications in the year, 6,634,073; and from the year 1733, when its issues were first reported, it has circulated 148,932,287 copies of various publications.

The book Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the poor was established in 1750. Its objects are the gratuitous distribution and the sale of Bibles, Testaments, and books of established excellence, not exclusively religious, as well as the publication of original and standard works, adapted to promote religious and moral instruction. It is a rule of this Society that no books of a controversial nature shall be distributed.

The Religious Tract and Book Society of Scotland was instituted in 1793, and it sells none but religious books. The first society in Great Britain to employ colporteurs in the distribution of approved publications, it has now from 110 to 120 agents thus employed. The adaption of such means to the