

"My own opinion is that there are circumstances when, from the social position of people with whom we may be brought into contact—high, or very low—or their peculiar religious attitude, or even their prejudices and hostility, it is desirable to give books, and make no attempt to sell them. But, as a general rule, it is my experience that our low prices deter scarcely any, even in Turkey, while the payment of the price brings out just those who, from intelligence, earnestness of character, candour, and education, as well as good sense, are the most likely to read the Scriptures, and not only to profit by them, but to communicate their views to others. Besides the demand of a small price reminds all, both of the liberality of their Christian brethren, and of their own obligation to possess and study the Word of God.

"I have stated my views on this point because, with the exceptions I have named, I regard gratis distribution as undesirable and out of harmony with God's general procedure, that a man must do his part—often a very laborious one—in order to obtain what is, after all, the gift of God; as, for example, in agriculture, and, indeed, in all our works. I think, too, that in the numerous and generous grants made by the Society, large provision is made for most of the cases I regard as exceptional.

"Now, I deduce from this that, if some of our brethren think this a mistaken course, and insist on another, which I regard as wasteful, inconsiderate, and fitted to depreciate the estimate of the Word in some cases, and in others to encourage a selfish traffic in the volumes so given, or even to lead to their destruction, it is only fair that they should be asked to act on their convictions at their own cost, and that they should not expect us to give them exceptional facilities for carrying out their views.

"Our selling prices abroad are very far indeed from representing the actual cost of the books; and I think there should be no ground of complaint if we ask our brethren who hold by gratis distribution to bear a little more of the cost of their own plan. Without that, or an approach to it, the working of the two systems cannot be properly compared."

The Report, recently issued by the Committee, contains testimony after testimony from the Society's Agents abroad as to the positive harm done through the contempt into which the Word of God is brought by profuse free distribution, especially in the East, where sacred books are treated with exceptional regard by people of various religions.

"The Rev. R. H. Weakley's testimony is the same as that of all the Society's experienced men," says the Report, in the chapter on Port Said: "'Tens of copies sold, after much earnest dealing with individual souls, represent much more real missionary work than thousands of copies given away easily to all receivers. There is much painful waste in the latter method of distributing the Holy Books.'"

After visiting Port Said twice, Mr. Weakley wrote, in July, that the greatest difficulty with which the Society's Depository and Colporteurs had to contend was the wasteful free distribution of the Society's own books, which was being made, to a large extent at its expense, before the very eyes of its own employés. "Packets of books, so distributed, are brought to our dépôt for sale by Arab boatmen, who had obtained them on board the ships for a few oranges or some other trifling article. The captain of a collier told Mr. Taylor the other day, 'It is no use your coming; we can buy cheaper from the Arab boatmen.'"

"The alleged justification for all this is that if one book in a thousand is useful, the effort is not in vain. The scandal caused by the misuse of the 999 is not considered. There is no serious effort to get at souls in this kind of work. A single Bible sold to an ungodly man after an hour or two's earnest exhortation tells more to the angels than the mechanical and hurried distribution of thousands on board vessels during their stay at the gate of the Suez Canal."

To similar purport come letters from all quarters. The following extract