

And the story became the occasion for carrying out an undertaking for which many circumstances had prepared the way. A public meeting was held on March 7th, 1804; £700 were subscribed, and the British and Foreign Bible Society started on its career. Its creed was as wide as the Bible, its aim as wide as the world. Its sole object was to encourage the circulation of the Holy Scriptures, without note or comment in the mother-tongue of all the peoples on the earth. It was British, as it attended to the wants of its own people. It was foreign, because in the spirit of the Master it was to do for others as it did for its own.

The British and Foreign Bible Society is the great centre and parent of the world's Bible Societies, or, rather, the Societies are all sisters and allies.

The year that ushered in the British and Foreign Bible Society brought into existence also the Basle Bible Society; and the next eleven years saw the commencement of twenty-eight Bible Societies, among which were the Prussian, the Hibernian, the Pennsylvanian, the Swedish, the Calcutta and the Netherlands. The following year, 1816, was signalized by the birth of eight more Bible Societies, the most important of which was the American, now the great rival of the British and Foreign in all generous, peaceful, sisterly and world-wide enterprise. No less than seventy-three Bible Societies have been founded since the British and Foreign. Of these, fifty-nine are in Europe, five in America and nine in India. In addition, the chief Society has now 6,953 auxiliaries, branches and associations at home and abroad. The little seed, sown at the opening portal of the century, has grown into a mighty tree with majestic and wide-spreading branches; and, truly, the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

The first foreign country that engaged the attention of the British and Foreign Bible Society was China, and China is the country that more than any other at the present moment is engrossing the attention of the same Society. Dr. Montucci had drawn attention to a Chinese manuscript of a harmony of the Gospels, the Acts and the Pauline Epistles in the British Museum. The committee knew nothing of the origin or character of the version, and, after full consideration, declined to reproduce it at two guineas a copy. The manuscript, however, was copied by Morrison, the first missionary to China, revised by him, and published at the expense of the Society. Since then the Society has published some twenty versions of the Scriptures in China, in a dozen languages, and about five million copies, in whole or in part, have been distributed. Before 1853 the expenditure of the Society in China exceeded £30,000, and since then it has grown yearly in an ever-increasing ratio. During the past year about a quarter of a million copies have been put into circulation.

Chiefly at the request of the Society, the united missionaries at the Shanghai conference voted unanimously in favour of union versions; and the committees of the three great societies will now have the joy of seeing the labours of all previous translators in China revised and harmonized and perfected under the guidance of the best scholarship of the empire. The diversity of rival versions, which was found to be a serious evil, will now turn out to be a real blessing, furnishing rich and abundant material for the new and unified works.

The first foreign version of the Scriptures actually printed by the Society was the Gospel of St John in Mohawk. The translation was made by Captain Norton, a chief of the Six Nations Indians, who was then on business in England. This was the beginning of a forward policy which has carried the Society's operations into all lands. Wherever written languages existed the Bible was translated into them, and became a standard and conservator of the language, as well as light and salvation to those who read. Where no written language existed, the flying words were caught on the wing and fixed upon the page; and the first book that the savage people saw or read was the Bible. The number of versions brought out by the great central Society