

THE BIBLE SOCIETY IN CHINA.

ADDRESS AT THE OPENING MEETING OF THE HELPERS' ASSOCIATION,
OCTOBER 7, BY REV. WILLIAM WRIGHT, D.D.

We are friends of the Bible Society, because the Bible has been our friend. We aim at spreading it everywhere among others, because its message of peace has been a blessing to ourselves.

On the first page of that Divine Book, the first recorded words of God are: "Let there be light." It is the work of the Bible Society to carry out, in its own sphere, that first-recorded Divine command.

A cry for light from a little girl in Wales was the incident that led to the formation of the Bible Society. That cry was heard by Wilberforce, by Zachary Macaulay, by Granville Sharp, by Mills, by other good men, and from that beginning the light has spread to Wales, to China, to the world.

This century of ours is the century of organized philanthropic effort. That is its chief characteristic. Everywhere—in schools, in hospitals, in homes for the outcast—you see the desire to help and you see it organized. There is a deep feeling that there is much evil around us—that it should and that it may be lessened; that our obligation to our neighbour is not fully discharged by Oriental hospitality or mediæval doles; that neither the cup of cold water from the table of the sumptuous glutton, nor proxy benefactions from ecclesiastical hands, relieve the civilized State from further concern as to the wants of the people: and hence our civilization has, during our century, made provision, however blunderingly, for the physical and temporal wants of the needy.

But the philanthropy of the century has not been limited to local and material needs. It aims at nothing less than the bringing of infinite grace to the infinite wants of man's moral nature, and in its all-embracing energy takes in those that are afar off as well as those that are within its own narrow sphere. In this work of universal beneficence the great central agency is the Bible Society. That Society began its career in the early days of the century, and in the composition of causes which have gone to the formation of what is noble, and true, and self-sacrificing in the century it has been the dominant and leading factor. In this connection I include all the Bible Societies.

It was in 1804 that the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded. In that year the Basle Society also came into existence. Within the next eleven years twenty-eight Bible Societies were formed. The following year saw the commencement of eight more Bible Societies, the most important of which was the American, the great rival of the British and Foreign in all generous, peaceful, and world-wide enterprises. The number of independent Bible Societies rose to seventy-three, and our Society has now about 7,000 auxiliaries, branches, and associations at home and abroad.

It is worthy of remembrance that the first subject which engaged the attention of the Bible Society was China. Nearly a century has passed since then, and now at its close it is again China which is absorbing attention. Last Monday resolutions of Committee were passed with regard to China which affect one quarter, at least, of the human race.

There has been within this period immense progress. When Morrison resolved to go to China he heard of a New Testament MS. which was in the British Museum. He copied much of it himself, and was able to take with him to China a complete transcript. It was proposed to publish it, but the scheme was given up, as the Committee did not know its value, and as each copy would have cost £2. Now a Chinese New Testament can be produced for 6d. Morrison began by revising the parts which were published by our Society. Nothing can be grander than Morrison's work. He went out to China when it was at the peril of a European's life to go. He fought with