

hammedan polygamy entails female seclusion. Hinduism exacts female isolation where caste purity might be impaired by the too near approach of any one not equally high in the religious birth-scale. And in other cases the protection of his own reputation from imputations swiftly spread and readily believed forbids a missionary or a colporteur from expounding or offering the Word of Life to the women of the East.

In such circumstances, a rapidly developing circulation of Bibles and Testaments cannot be expected, even if trained native Christian women, of suitable social rank, were more abundantly forthcoming for employment as Bible-women than is yet the case in India and China. And there have been difficulties of another kind to overcome.

The tabular statement, which will be found in the Report, furnishes some encouraging marks of progress towards the satisfactory attainment of the Committee's aim. The number of societies participating in the grants is larger than in any previous report, and although some of them have only recently entered the lists, or resumed a place in it, and the figures for the grant year ending with September 30, 1888, are in other cases incomplete, the totals are for the most part much ahead of those recorded in last year's Report. The work of three hundred and twenty-six Bible-women, in place of two hundred and seventy-three, is reported upon—an increase of fifty-three. The circulation effected, so far as stated in the returns, shows a decrease of ninety-three copies in gifts, and an increase of six hundred and twenty-two copies in sales. Its total of 7,070 copies includes one hundred and fifty-three Bibles and two hundred and fifty-nine Testaments among those sold. The facilities for such sales are not equally great everywhere, but those superintendents who still comment on the mistake of expecting *any* circulation to be effected by the Bible-women among Eastern females would do well to notice how much is already accomplished in this direction by those who attempt it. It is true that heathen and Mohammedan women commonly have very little money at their own disposal, nor can they usually be expected to buy whole Bibles or Testaments for themselves. But in the case of the younger women, if their interest in the Scriptures is first aroused by hearing them read, and then they are led on to learn how to read the Book for themselves, there ought to be no great difficulty in persuading them to go as far as to buy a Gospel of their own. Let it then be borne in mind that grants from the Bible Society are distinctly intended to *lead up to this result*, and are not made to save missionary societies the cost of maintaining teachers to prepare native catechumens for baptism or confirmation, or to carry on general evangelistic work among the heathen. This Society, as its name indicates, is specially charged with the duty of providing and diffusing God's Book, and it must always keep this object in view in its expenditure.

The provision of copies for circulation among native females is not contemplated in the grants for Bible-women. The Society assists its Auxiliaries in the East to issue vernacular Scriptures at prices far below their cost, and the requisite copies should be obtained from those Auxiliaries.

The weekly average number of females to whom the Scriptures are read by the Bible-women is now returned at 14,762, as against 10,312 a year ago. On the other hand, the number of those returned as having been taught within the year to read up to the standard of being able to read the Bible for themselves has fallen from 2,433 to 1,922. But in neither case are these figures very reliable for perfect accuracy.

Since the last report was issued the Committee have voted varying sums, as given in the table, to thirty-two distinct societies, and reaching a total of £2,378 19s. 4d. Of this total the sum of £824 8s. 4d. was in completion of the grants for the year ending September 30, 1888, towards which payments on account had previously been made. The remainder (£1,554 11s.) consisted almost entirely of the half maxima advanced, *on account*, for the year ending September 30, 1889.